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SUNRISE TO SUNSET

Also by Adrian Bell

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THE ADRIAN BELL OMNIBUS

[Corduroy—Silver Ley—The Cherry Tree]

SUNRISE *to* SUNSET

Adrian Bell



LONDON

John Lane The Bodley Head

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CHAPTER ONE

In May 1940, on the urgent advice of friends and relatives, Nora took the children away from our East Coast home to her sister who had a school in Westmorland, and had hired for our family an empty cottage there.

A little later, when I had hoed the roots, I took a load of supplies up to Nora: buckets of our eggs, materials for children's clothes. We always kept a good store of everything, war or no war; and it looked as though we might not see these things again.

The sentry standing by the bridge-barricade showed no interest in me and my rather suspicious-looking load of bundles going by at seven o'clock in the morning. I drove through barricade after barricade, asked the way of a man who was standing in the street of a small town. 'Got far to go?' he said, when he had directed me. He was holding a child by the hand, and eyed the toy wheelbarrow on top of the bundles, and a doll called Belinda gazing over its edge. I told him, and of my family. 'Well, best of luck, old man.' He stood there that Sunday morning, like others I passed, waiting for what might come—with a sudden spontaneous rush of fellow-feeling, fellow-parenthood, when I spoke to him. It was as though the springs of human brotherhood were ready at a touch to be released.

Then I was pounced on by a policeman: he almost fell through my side-window from his bicycle. But it was for disregarding traffic lights. Suddenly, at my explanation that I was looking for them on the other side of the street, he became mild, almost friendly. 'Well, you'd better be getting on,' he said.

I stopped in Norwich. A stranger came across the market-place to me with a paper. 'I say, this is terrible,' he cried, flapping it at me. 'The Belgians given up—we're surrounded—we're done for.' A

large, heavy man, middle-aged, he looked as though he had been suddenly awakened after a sleep of fifty years. He stared about him helplessly.

I went into the cathedral. I knew it well ; but it never fails of its power. To-day it was for me England's past richly gathered up in strength—its spire sailing steadily on through the clouds and blue sky ; and the homely figures on the bosses—a loaded gleaner, a medieval miller and mill.

I did not fear, then, ultimately for England ; only for the England of the man with the paper. And that must crumble anyhow so that England might arise.

There was not a signpost in the land. A family car gave me a lead for twenty-five miles : the family within parted from me with fervent wishes for the safety of my children. People were like that, that day, at that time.

On the outskirts of Sherwood Forest it looked like a Bank Holiday. I stopped for a glass of beer : cars were parked all along the road : the pub was full. A tramp came in with an ex-Service story of the last war, and the publican gave him a packet of cigarettes.

Sheffield fumed in its hollow like a great crater, and high above floated innumerable silvery barrage balloons, like souls escaping heavenward. I asked the way. Now was the added difficulty of not understanding what the people said.

'Go reet on by t'robots.' Again and again 't'robots' came into it. Sheffield a city of robots ? At last I tumbled to it that robots were traffic lights.

So I came out of the pit. But no sooner did a few green fields appear, than another town clamped down its brick and pavings upon them. I drove on through miles of industrial landscape. I felt here the vast power that fed the war. I thought of the same leagues of smoke and clangour in Germany ; and it seemed beyond human power ever to stop it. I passed a super-factory, like a great funnelled ship riding the land. Power emanated from it, as power

emanated from the spire of Norwich. It was power against power, I felt.

And then, coming up a hill, I asked a woman the way. She was old, and had a shawl over her head. She directed me to Keighley : her voice sang in the wind ; she looked clear-eyed, free. I came to fields again, and farms.

I crossed the Pennines. On the other side, the war seemed shut away. People were picnicking on the moors, lying in the sun with their coats off beside shiny cars. There were no barricades, no soldiers to be seen. It was like a dream after our Suffolk coast-line.

And as the sun grew low, I came gliding into Westmorland, a strange land to me, with ramparts of fells shutting off the distance, and little hills rolling about between, and clefts of valleys, and rushing stony waters. I passed masses of rhododendrons, flowering giant bushes of them. White-washed farms dotted the intricate view like squares of chalk. I stopped and smelt the air : it was curiously cool, yet not brisk, like being inside a well. A great stillness was in the place, no sense of travel or movement, as in the cloud-swift East-Anglian plain.

I asked my way, and discovered I had not taken in a word : I had been listening to the ring of the dialect. But at last I turned off the road through a farmyard ; pushed open a gate, and began to descend a steep stony track with my precious load. A beck swirled at the bottom of a sheer fall on my left : curly-horned sheep gazed down at me from the high rocks on my right. I had to clamp myself to the brakes : I skidded down to the level of the beck in that cleft of hills, past a farm building like a medieval fort, and there was Nora, sitting on a low wall beside a little house.

CHAPTER TWO

It was a square stone house that looked as though it had been hewn out from within, rather than built. The walls were three feet thick; the windows deep holes. It was so sunk in its cleft of hills that the cows above looked as though they could step from their pasture on to the roof. There was no level ground other than the stony track that passed the door, while the beck swirled under the kitchen window. Next to the house, joined to it, was a mill, with its water-wheel at its side. Idle now on account of a careless dresser having broken one of the stones the previous year, I was told, but in all probability to be restarted again. Cows—the most curious of creatures—had not yet grown used to the new inhabitants of Beck Mill: they stared down from above, stood at the yard gate, waded up the beck and looked in at the kitchen window. Fowls that had been clucking round the doorstep recovered from their fright at my arrival, and returned, using the car as a perch.

As I was unloading the goods (not an egg was broken, though I had felt the load go bump on to the axle over pot-holes), I noticed two boys splashing about in a pool into which the beck cascaded over rocks.

'Those are Mrs. Rockfall's boys,' Nora said. They went running off over a plank bridge and up a steep track beyond.

I heard another voice, 'Now run along home and get dressed: you'll catch your death of cold.' I saw a large fair woman just passing the boys on her way down. She carried a couple of pillows and a small meat-safe under one arm, and a large square object, which I did not at first recognize, under the other. Thus loaded, she clattered down a steep bank from rock to rock, and stepped upon the bridge. There she stuck, bulked out like a pack-horse, being too

wide for the hand-rails. I hurried to help her. 'Eh, but I can manage, thanks,' she said, as she was slewing herself round to try sideways. However, she let me take the thing in her left arm, which I found was a little commode, pale green, fluted at the edges, with a delicate eighteenth-century design upon the front.

'This is a pretty piece,' I said.

She laughed. 'It's been kickin' about t'middenstead for years.' Her voice had a way of subsiding into a murmur after a laughing exclamatory start, as though she wanted breath to finish. She added something about 'our primitive country ways'. I assured her we were used to ways even more primitive, in that they did not trouble to paint gilded designs on our earth-closets in Suffolk.

She seemed surprised that the (to her) sophisticated south still had an earth-closet anywhere. 'Do you have a pail or a pit?' she asked, adding as an after-thought, 'you're Mr. Bell, I expect.' We continued to the mill-cottage, discussing the relative merits of pits and pails. She was interested, I found, in every detail of life; a round-faced woman of about forty-five, handsome and youthful still, with a look of cheerful irony, and a rosy complexion.

Nora, seeing her, said, 'Oh, Mrs. Rockfall, you shouldn't have loaded yourself up like that. The things could have waited.'

'Nay,' she cried, laughing deprecatingly. 'Tis nothing. And 'tis such a to-do getting horse into cart and over t'beck and all, I could as easy bring them down on my back.'

Mrs. Rockfall lived in Brant Farm on the opposite hill; and Beck Mill, with its eleven acres, went with their farm.

'Beck Mill's sort of my hobby,' she said, 'Tis snug down here in winter: 'tis where I started married life.' She unburdened herself of the meat-safe, then handed Nora the pillows, thrusting one under her nose and asking, 'Can you smell t'duck?'

There was a slight, yet not altogether unpleasant, smell of poultry yard when one put one's nose into the pillows. 'Twill wear off I think : they're only just made. We'll soon have feathers enough for another bed,' she added.

'You make all your own beds ?' I asked.

'Oh yes,' she replied, 'and our stockings and rugs. 'Tis how we pass t'winter-time. When we all get round a rug 'tis soon made.'

She had brought down with her half a cheese, also of her own make. She looked at it critically : it was white and slightly crumbly where it had been cut, of the consistency of a Cheshire. 'No two's ever alike.'

She was very interested to know of the farming of Suffolk, and it seemed a sort of El Dorado to her, as I spoke of the great acreage of corn. They could not grow much corn in the high bleak parish of Fellside, she said, though in days gone by every farm had grown a little, before wheaten flour had come in from outside ; and now they were having to plough up again, owing to the war.

Twilight was falling when Mrs. Rockfall departed again over the bridge, and indoors Nora had spread the table in the living-room with home-made bread, butter, and cheese ; while bacon was frying on a stick fire in the open range.

All the while Mrs. Rockfall talked she had not been idle. We carried the commode, which once must have adorned some Georgian gentleman's house, into the fortress-like grey building. Above, it was a barn, while below, owing to the slope of the ground, was room for cattle stalls and a storage place. There, with hammer and nails, Mrs. Rockfall soon boarded in a corner and hung a door, though there had seemed nothing to do it with but a heap of odds and ends. She wielded the hammer like a man with her big bare arm. Coming out, she surveyed the end of the mill house, pointing out to me a window which had only lately been added, giving a view down the valley.

'I pulled down an old pig-hole against t'house,' she said. 'We've reared many a pig in there whiles we lived here.' This was no light job—as it had been built of stone, to last for ever—nobody having dreamed of a day when it should be an offence against the law to keep a pig within so many yards of your dwelling. Of the stones of the 'pig-hole' she had built a wall three feet thick and four feet high with her own hands. This, with the wall beside the beck, and an end wall, made an oblong enclosure at the end of the house beside the track. Here, she said, she was proposing to make a garden, 'one afternoon when I get time'. I could not even see any soil of which to make it, only stones. But already I was beginning to have faith in Mrs. Rockfall's power to make something out of nothing, even a garden in an afternoon where there was no earth.

Though it was twilight now in the valley, the sun still shone on the slope above. The Brow, Mrs. Rockfall had called it: it was so steep that the cattle had made narrow terraced paths on which to stand and graze; and in one place there went up from the strip of level sward beside the beck a semi-natural stairway of steps in the grass.

It really was beautiful—the swirling clear water, the rocks, a wood hanging down the hill-side, and the rich close-cropped sward that was like a lawn.

'Yes, it's lovely,' Nora agreed, as we washed up the supper things with this view before us. 'The only thing wrong with it is that it isn't Suffolk.'

To her, the break in our local earth-life was a pause in life itself. A vista of plain, clayey Suffolk soil in good heart was more to her than all the picturesque rocks and musical streams in Westmorland.

Upstairs, the twins slept in one little room, Anthea in another. She lay in a double bed that half-filled the room, deep in a mattress of Mrs. Rockfall's duck feathers, her golden hair scattered over the pillow.

I stood in that rugged old room while Nora tucked her up, listening to the noise of the tumbling beck. It gave one a sense, in its hurrying by the window, of living processes that must never for a moment halt. The water, so near to its source on those fells, itself seemed young and life-like, while the old stark house watched the sun's last gleam on the top of the Brow lighting a few curly-horned sheep. Here, where generations had dwelt milling the grain of life, I felt a continuing power. This house of unhewn stone was one of the old secret sources, nourishing the flower-like sleep of children.

When Anthea first woke up in Beck Mill, and saw the fells rising distantly at the end of the valley, she cried, 'Mummy, what are those big pieces over there?'

A dreaming sort of light moved among the hills, as next morning I made my way through valleys loud with tumbling becks to visit Nora's sister and the cousins. The main line to Scotland passed near by, and all night and all day trainloads of tired soldiers went by. I spoke to an old farmer I met in a field near the line. War was wrong, he said. I discovered he was a Quaker. And later, farther on, I found a meeting-house of the Friends in a valley, a beautiful old stone building beside a beck, with an orchard opposite and beehives among the trees. There was a notice-board facing the road on which was a printed sheet. I cannot remember the exact words, but they referred to principles laid down at the founding of the sect, not to 'take up arms to war with any adversary in the flesh'. - Adding, 'we reaffirm this principle to-day'. Nobody had defaced the notice or torn it down, in this valley of flowery meadows, running water, and sycamores with dense shadows.

The people of that valley were mostly Quakers, I discovered; had been so, in successive generations, since the beginning of the movement. They went about their immemorial farming all the week, and

on Sundays met in their meeting-house under the sycamores.

The farmer I encountered was almost blind now, but he still went about his little fields—he knew them so well—feeding his stock. His son had returned from a provincial university in which he had just passed an examination with distinction, and his sister also, to work the farm for their old parents. Some might have considered this a pity, but here it seemed natural and right. I could never see why it should be considered a waste of education to turn to farming afterwards; seeing that that is what enriches it above a mere business, and can restore to the life something of its early health.

There was a three-cornered field of oats on his farm—about two acres—which looked thriving.

‘Yes,’ said the old father, leaning his bucket of eggs on the wall. ‘And we’ve to plough another acre and a half this year.’

He spoke as though that were a great deal. I asked him how he managed for horses and implements with so small an acreage. They all kept one horse, he said, and borrowed from each other to make up a plough team. There were ancestral ploughs in the district, because years ago each farm had grown its field of corn and roots for food and fodder. Times had changed, and changed again; and the forgotten ploughs and harrows were found in overgrown corners, ‘under dykes’, still fit for service. I asked about reaping. They did that by hand, he said.

The while he talked, the trains passed along the valley; trains full of men, then trains of guns, of complicated machinery of destruction of all kinds.

I followed his direction and came to Nora’s sister’s school, evacuated from London. It was a large house, set half-way up to the fells. She gave me a vivid picture of the previous winter, with water freezing on the kitchen floor as it splashed from the pails the boys brought in.

I found here that organized games had largely given place to rambling about the woods, fells, and farms. The French mistress, in whom the love of the soil must have been ancestral, had organized the reclamation of the great walled kitchen garden, and had refurbished some of the ruinous frames. Two of the boys who had shown a zest for cultivation as soon as they had been brought in touch with it, were her chief assistants. Early in the morning they went into the fields with pails and shovels collecting horse-manure, and had already a good pile of this. They spent their spare time on one or other of the neighbouring farms, fetching up horses or cattle, helping feed calves.

I was invited to stay to lunch, as there were several hundreds of cabbage plants to be planted out that afternoon. So I soon found myself hard at work on this 'foreign' soil. It was grey and dusty with unaccustomed drought, and full of stones. The heat beat off the high walls. It seemed as though nothing could live in it. But mademoiselle had made up her mind that the plants should live, and had a chain of boys with buckets of water. Lest I should be inclined to spoil the plants in order to spare all those young strong limbs, she invited me to water them freely. Which I did, bucket after bucket, and there was always a full one at my elbow. It was a horticulturist's heaven. All those plants survived.

I saw the still unreclaimed portion of the food garden, waist-high in weeds. It was a measure of what the boys had accomplished in the other part. I told mademoiselle that it was the best lesson she had ever taught them. 'Wait', she said, 'till our pigs arrive.' She showed me two sties—no, pig-mansions they were—which they had discovered as they hacked down a jungle of weeds. They were built of dressed stone, with properly keyed arches connecting sleeping quarters with runs, which were fenced with the most expensive iron railings.

'But what a shame they should stand empty!' she cried. 'And here's the soil ready to blow away.' The fire of generations of national husbandry was in her indignation. It was a work of recivilization she was engaged on.

Now we had finished putting in the plants; and all the boys who had been carrying water rushed off to plunge in it in the tarn. The tarn stood some way above the house, out upon the wild fell, banked up on its lower side. A solitary place, haunted by curlew's cries, now suddenly full of merry boys. There was always a breeze up there, and the choppy water glittered like diamonds. A shepherd-farmer sat by the tarn with his two dogs, looking on smilingly at the sport of the boys. There were miles of open (unwalled) fell up there, he said, and a number of flocks fed on it; yet the flocks never got mixed. The man wore clogs, as everybody did here, with brass caps over the toes. It is the toes that get the knocks in those rocky places. From the tarn there was a view of hazy leagues, with hills ghostly and dim on the horizon.

Unlike the Suffolk man, whose richly domestic farming is screened from his neighbours' by woods and hedges in a flat landscape, the lonely fell farmer, in reality more cut off, cannot go up to his sheep and look about him without feeling part of a great community of the hills. Perhaps that is why they are so conscious of one another and their doings, though they actually visit one another less than Suffolk farmers.

The two boys who were interested in the land immediately began asking the shepherd at the tarn about his farm and its stock; and finally asked, 'Can we come and do some work on your farm?' 'Ay,' he replied with a smile, 'come just whenever you like.'

While we had been planting the greens, other boys had gone on errands to the village shop; a long way uphill and down, but they thought nothing

of it. They now came toiling up to the tarn, their pockets bulging with sweets and bottles of coloured drinks. After they had bathed, out came these paper bags and bottles (though in addition an ample picnic tea was also to be eaten). They overwhelmed me with generosity; I had forgotten the amount of these things that young boys can consume, and I must have seemed rather a joyless creature in refusing more than one or two of the things I was offered. They sat down to an ecstatic feast up there on the wild-scented slopes of rock and heather.

The boys who brought the sweets also brought news of the owl's nest. This had been discovered some days ago by one small untidy, untidyable wiry boy, who went about perpetually with one stocking down to his ankle—sometimes both. He was the most daring tree-climber and the school's acknowledged, though not official, leader. The young owls were just coming out and standing on the boughs, and their progress was a matter of daily, hourly, concern to the boys. Between lessons they would run out and stand under the great beech tree, staring up at and being stared down upon by the round-eyed young owls that looked so old.

CHAPTER THREE

The next morning I was walking along the beck before breakfast when I met one of Mrs. Rockfall's daughters, a tall, fair girl of nineteen named Molly. She was feeding her hens; or rather, they were her sister Eileen's hens. Everything was in what she called a 'scrow' that morning, since Eileen had to go into market, and they had had word the day before from a neighbour who had visited his flock on the fell, that all the sheep up there had been attacked by the fly, and that numbers were dead and dying. It was an unheard of thing, apparently,

for the sheep on the fell to get the fly so early in the summer, but the great heat (to us southern folk it was just a pleasant warmth) was responsible. So they must round up the flock to-day and bring them down home to be dipped: her father had already set off with Rover and Flash, but Rover was old and Flash but half-trained, and there were a hundred acres of rocks, bogs, and streams from which to gather the sheep. They were at present without any hired labour on the farm, could not get any; so she, Molly, was to follow her father up to the fell as soon as she had fed the calves and poultry.

'Whereabouts is your fell land?' I asked her.

She pointed to where the chain of hills rose to a peak.

'Is that yours?' I stared, but could see no sign of life upon it. 'No, that's what we call t'Beacon: our fell's over behind it. 'Tis an hour's good walking to get to it.'

So it looked like being an all-day job, rounding up the sheep and getting them home to the farm. I said, would they like me to come and help? She welcomed the idea. 'Because I know we shall have a job; they're wild, and Rover won't offer to run far, and Flash won't obey.' She said she was going to have an early dinner, then start. The way to the fell led past Beck Mill, and she would call for me.

I was prepared for her early appearance, but not at half-past eleven, which was when she arrived. Yes, she'd had her dinner. So I hastily drank a glass of milk and thrust a hunk of bread and their farm-house cheese into my pocket, and set off at her side.

It was a long walk: I do not think I have ever walked so far continuously uphill. Above the mill the beck swept down in a series of cascades, deeply bitten into the narrow meadow. There was hardly room for the cart-track in one place, between the beck and the bank which contained the mill-race;

the side of the beck had been so eroded away. In another place I noted a retaining wall had been built with rocks in the beck's side. I began to have a sense of the hard labour involved in this Westmorland farming. The mill-race was a mere runnel beside the hedge on our right, but gushing and pure, and contained on a level with our heads. A contrast to the wide head of water necessary for the accumulation of power on our slow Suffolk rivers. The valley broadened, and was interlaced with becks which met in a dash of foam. There, a level three acres stood waist-high in oats.

'How many times do you have to cross the beck to get them home at harvest?' I asked.

'Three times,' Molly said, 'to get to Brant Farm : twice if we leave them at t'mill barn.'

It looked an impossible country to farm ; yet these folk farmed it and had lived on it for generations.

We had been walking some time, but the Beacon still looked as distant as ever. A clump of wind-bent firs stood up there, looking no bigger than bushes from here. It looked to me as though it would take all afternoon to get there. We passed one or two farms settled snugly into little depressions of the land ; gazed down on one from so directly above that it looked like a model, with miniature fowls following a miniature farmer's wife round the barn. We passed more fields of oats, small occasional patches among the pastures, and usually another acre or two beside them planted with roots and kale.

We had come along a narrow granite road. It was like going back in time to be walking on a surface that was not tarmac. No cars passed us. In one place the road passed through unhedged grazing ground : it was gated here. We pushed a gate open, and it swung back and shoved us through, by reason of a huge iron weight on a wire, shutting itself with a resounding bang. 'Please Shut This Gate' was printed on it in whitewash. 'That's Belton's land,' Molly said. 'They milk thirty-five cows : there's

seven of them, besides the two girls and old Mr. Belton. They have hundreds of acres of fell above High Rigg, and some of what used to be t'best land in the parish.'

'Isn't it still?'

'Ah well, farming's had its ups and downs. They've pulled land round a fair bit since they've been there.'

That gate was my first introduction to the Beltons, and was somehow expressive of that forthright family in their lonely Hall.

We turned off along a grass track, between walls. Up and up. Never had they known so much corn as this year, Molly said. I turned to look at the view widening at our feet, with small odd-shaped patches of green oats here and there. I tried to describe to Molly what a real corn landscape looked like.

'We've fifteen acres,' she told me. 'Father says he doesn't know how we're going to get it all harvested.'

'What sort of corn?' I asked.

She looked at me. 'Why—just corn.'

'Oats and——'

'Yes, oats : corn.'

I found that 'corn' meant oats here, and only oats. Nothing else had ever been grown here : it was the only corn that would ripen. I became aware that I was enjoying something exceptional in these high clear days. The normal expectation was for a wet summer.

The last fields were left behind : the lane ended. We came out now on to a kind of moorland, sparkling with watercourses. There was no respite to the gradient : it grew steeper, and the rough spongy grass of the fell was toilsome. At last I looked up and saw the weather-beaten grove of the Beacon close above on our left. I was surprised to see they were quite big trees, but most expressive in their forms of wind. We were at the top : it was boggy,

full of springs that fed the beck which surged past our mill. As we had climbed we had gone back in the seasons. From early June through May, April : up here the air was March, the sky a vast milky radiance. The grass was grey, as though frost-bitten. Distantly I caught a glister of the sea. Great rocks reared out of the fell all around. A cuckoo called, clear through the high bare calm. And on the farther side, after that last look back, all connection with the world of farms and men was lost. Here was such a landscape as might have been on the moon : bare slopes that were almost sheer ; and beyond them more, and yet more. I strained my eyes, but could see in the distance no resumption of farming lands, no end to the folds of solitude. Stony becks ran through the gullies.

We came at last to a gate in a wall. The wall followed the contours of the land, in its solitary journey up and down into the distance of the fells. Men must have climbed from far homes to build it centuries ago, so that even the highest solitude was not inviolate.

The gate was dilapidated, reinforced with bits of tin and propped with stones. So we climbed over the wall. Down there I saw a small shock-headed figure on the hundred acres of rocky slope. He looked small because he was bowed under a great load—it was white, like a load of bedding. It was the fleeces of the sheep he had found dead. He staggered upwards with it, slipping and sliding over rocks, then seeming to be half-bogged in tussocky grass. In his right hand he had a wooden crook, with which he gesticulated to his dogs. There was a stone sheep-fold in the middle of the fell, and it was near this we met. Molly had been anxiously looking about as we came down. 'Oh, there's several dead, I know,' she said, and sent Flash galloping to what I thought was a rock, but it turned out to be a sheep, though it would not move : it was dead.

I discovered that Westmorland farmers' daughters

are not as fastidious as some Suffolk ones have become. Molly had no revulsions from remains of sheep some time dead. Quick the natural process was up here : some flattened shapes of woolly shreds already bore no more resemblance to sheep than a boot-print to the boot that made it.

As we met John Rockfall, he cast down his load of fleeces. 'Tis war-rm,' he cried to me. Quickly he turned and called to the dogs, 'He' Rover, he' Flash—go'p forrard !'

There followed a quarter of an hour of stumbling over rocks, becks, and bogs, waving and hallooing. 'T'one dog's too old : t'other's too wild,' Rockfall said. It is no joke doing duty as sheep-dog on the fells. My thick shoes were ready to fall to pieces as it was : Rockfall's brass-toed clogs were the only things that would stand up to the rocks.

At last we got all the sheep rounded up and climbing towards the gate. They set up a great baa-ing as they moved in procession ; a tragic, fateful sound in that high solitude. These were the native sheep, nimble as goats, with coarse hanging fleeces and curled horns. There was a long halt at the gate, while Rockfall undid it bit by bit, untwisting wire, removing stones, till the thing fell to pieces and the sheep went through. They continued calling as they surged through the gateway, and John Rockfall stood counting them, ruddy and shock-headed. Curiously old-fashioned and Quakerish he looked in his breeches, rough stockings and low buckled clogs : in fact, the whole scene was elemental, allegorical, like a scene out of the *Pilgrim's Progress*.

After the last sheep had passed through, Rockfall consulted a diminutive notebook and made a jotting with a stub of pencil. 'Lost nigh twenty, I should say,' he announced, and scratched his head and sighed.

'I only counted eight dead ones, father,' said Molly.

'Ah, there's others lie about we've not found.

Never known t'fly to be a trouble up here afore August,' he said to me. 'I'll be told 'tis my own fault, I ought to have seen to them sooner. But there's everything to do, and you can't get labour these days. We don't reckon to be troubled with fly up here till August,' he repeated in an aggrieved tone.

The sheep were already on their way while we put up the dilapidated gate again. 'I always say I'll put a new gate up here,' he said, as he pieced it together. 'Tisn't for want of meaning to.' With all the expanse of the Beacon before them the sheep chose one faintly marked track. This was the way down to the farm, and they knew it. At every gateway in the fell-walls we paused to let Rockfall count them through; and after each counting he noted a figure down in his notebook. Gradually the number of the lost sheep dwindled, until it had come down to something like Molly's estimate.

Occasionally he threw down his load of fleeces, and flung himself flat and drank from one of the many watercourses that sparkled in the sun. I did the same. As I drank, the mournful crying of the sheep rang in my ears. They seemed to stir up the spirit of the place, as did the ice-cold water pouring down my throat.

'He's not had any dinner,' Molly said of me.

'What!' Rockfall looked really shocked. 'Aren't you hungered?' I told him I was not particularly hungry: but he looked at me uncertainly, as though expecting me to drop down and become an additional load along with the fleeces. I did not know then the importance of the many meals at their due times to the hill farmers. It has seemed to me that their digestions work at twice our lowland rate.

As it was, we soon had a casualty. One of the sheep was lame, and grew worse as we proceeded. She stopped, and he laid a hand on her back, calling her kindly and coaxing her with many 'thou's', then shoved. Soon we were both shoving. He

turned her over and attended to her feet, and tried again.

As we returned over the top of the Beacon, the cuckoo's call sounded to us again through the milky haze that veiled the view of farms. Tarns in the opposite hills glittered. How comforting the fertile man-made landscape appeared ; and the rigours of the life that kept it were as the mere tingling of human health. I saw how the valley of Fellside—the valley of little valleys—lay among the barren heights, a little emerald of fertility. That a main line and a main road ran through it was not apparent here ; it was as a home of men that it impressed, after the moon-bareness beyond, its church and small white steadings appeared a very flower and wonder of civilization. For, going away into that solitude one really did take on a planetary sense, and descended as into a new world.

It was an hour and a half's journey down with the sheep—Rockfall told me how the winter before, during the snow, he had walked up to the fell every day with a truss of hay on his back, to keep them alive. I asked him, didn't he use a horse ? No ; he carried it on his back. It may have been due to our different dialects, but I never have quite understood why he did not use the horse for those journeys to the fell. The boggy places may have had something to do with it, as also the fact that John Rockfall in his anxiety to get on with a job, would use his own body rather than start up a machine or harness a horse.

He asked me about the farming of Suffolk as we went down under the empty white sky. I had difficulty in understanding him at first—that 'ste-ans', for instance, meant stones. Although they lived such a self-contained life, I found the people of Fellside keenly interested in the ways of other folk.

So we came again to the walled lane. Here the sheep jammed. The ones in front stopped to crop the lush grass, blocking the rest, and nothing would move them. Rockfall sent the dogs forward among

them, but Rover was dead-beat and made only a token effort, while Flash for all his prancing to and fro was equally ineffectual. No, even driving sheep is not as simple as it looks. We split up the flock between us. Molly went in front with a few, a green branch in her hand; I followed with the main body, and Rockfall came behind with the laggards and the lame one. Clegs and flies buzzed all round us now: the sheep travelled under a cloud of them; but I was too busy keeping them on the move to bother. If the front ones stopped for more than a moment, some of those behind would try to break back. The only thing was to keep the three lots separate and prevent leakages which would cause one lot to become too large, and jam between the walls.

Rockfall was being left farther and farther behind with his lame one. At length she stopped, and could not be persuaded to go another step. So Rockfall lifted her over a wall, and laid her gently in the long grass of a mowing meadow. It belonged to his brother, he said. She could stay there for the night. He added, 'Tis lucky we got her so far.'

We came again to the granite road, and the going was easier; particularly as nobody seemed to expect any traffic. A man met Molly on the road, and stopped and told her something. When we came up with her she passed it on to us. 'France has ceased hostilities,' she said. It was shattering. But somehow, after the crying of the sheep on the fells it seemed unreal, without context.

But in a day or two I knew it would not seem so, when I returned to the barbed wire of Suffolk and my own land.

From the heights I had seen Brant Farm as a whole. It was a sort of island among the beck: an oblong hump of a hill in the middle of the valley. And where at one end it elongated to a point, there stood Brant farmstead like a fortress on its spur, surrounded by its stone wall.

'Let them lie on t'Brow to-night,' John Rockfall said, as we drove the sheep across the beck past the mill. So we left them on a steep slope under the farm. 'Come on,' cried Rockfall to me as I prepared to turn aside to the mill; 'you must come and have a cup of tea wi' us.' The very idea that I should have even offered to turn in at my own place was almost an insult. So I followed them up the steep track athwart the Brow to the farm.

Several times on our way down Molly had said, 'Aren't you going to eat your bread and cheese now?' But I had been too busy. Now she called to her mother, who was summoning me in, 'He hasn't even had any dinner.'

'Why you must be famished,' she cried. But I stopped a minute or two to see some calves Rockfall showed me. By the time I came indoors, bacon and potatoes were frying in a pan hanging from a hook over the open fire. In addition, the big square table that nearly filled the room was spread with home-made food—bread, butter, jam, pasties, cake, and cheese.

Westmorland folk are very hospitable, and no visit is complete without the visitor partaking of a meal. And as the day at Brant Farm was full of meals, there was little likelihood of anyone turning up when one was neither in progress nor due. And there was such an absence of class-consciousness, or self-consciousness, or both, that there was no discrimination between visitors. The grocer's man came for orders once a month; the clergyman called for a social chat; or a stranger like me came following their sheep down from the fells—and everyone equally had to eat with them.

The bacon—home-fed and home-cured—was genuinely good, but strange to me, as it was unsmoked. I ate so largely of all these things that I began to be ashamed, but to them my appetite seemed very moderate.

John Rockfall sat in an antique wooden elbow-

chair, his right hand on the handle of a large brown tea-pot, from which he poured out for the whole family.

When I first went in, I found Molly cutting bread and butter with a big black-handled knife. I was surprised at her quickness. I had only been a few minutes behind her, yet she had already changed her sky-blue frock.

I asked her the time, as the clock seemed to have stopped, pointing to half-past ten. She glanced at it. 'Four o'clock,' she said; 'or maybe half-past: 'tis within half an hour of being right.'

'But it says half-past ten,' I said.

'No—'tis upside down: 'twill only go so since Jimmy knocked it off dresser.'

I said something about the journey home with the sheep. She smiled, cutting the bread and butter.

'Who do you think I am?' she asked. Just then Molly walked in.

'They say we're alike,' Eileen her twin sister said, 'but I don't see it.'

Looking more closely, I saw that she was really a little more round-faced than Molly, and I had made the old, old mistake, so amusing to them.

CHAPTER FOUR

As I lay in the big double bed that filled the little mill bedroom that night, I reflected I must be lying on whole yardfuls of Rockfall poultry. No millionaire could have slept more softly, luxuriously, than these folk after their hard days on the fells. Here was a new scale of values. What the price of down pillows was to-day I did not know, let alone deep feather beds; but here they were cheaper than the cheapest cotton-waste-stuffed pillow, because they cost nothing but the making.

The next morning I went with Molly to help her

bring the lame sheep home. On the way she showed me her garden, a walled patch of young vegetables, with thorns laid under the top stones of the wall. These, she assured me, kept the fowls from jumping over, and were much cheaper than netting, costing only labour and scratches. The garden narrowed to a point at one end, and there an apple-tree stood, rather dwarfed by the winds. That was almost the only fruit tree I saw on the farm.

She took me by a short cut to the field where the sheep had been laid. We passed through the yard of the next farm, belonging to Rockfall's brother, Harvey: a neat whitewashed house, with grey barn and shippon opposite, whose doorways were framed in whitewash to the extent of a foot all round. A square walled and paved enclosure, such as I had seen on Brant Farm, was already half-full of manure ('a stone cupboard for manure', Anthea called it), and there was a small walled front garden. I remember the brightness of phloxes against the grey stones, and a separator being turned by a woman in a mob cap, seen through the open door of the dairy at the end of the house. Two large cats sat on the wall; and in front of the dairy was a pavement of scrubbed flags. This farm was almost a mile from any road, a hilly mile too. We climbed sharply out of the yard, and soon the buildings were well below us. Another neat white farm came into view beyond: there, Molly told me, her grandmother lived, with her father's youngest brother and sister. That was the family's original home. She said, on my asking her, that people here seldom left their farms for others, but handed them down from father to son. The farm I was looking at had been in the Rockfall family for two hundred years.

The skies were quiet: war and cities seemed but a rumour here. But once wild invaders had come down from those barren hills. That was long ago, forgotten but for the massive antiquity of certain buildings, and the enviable fertility of the fields,

seen from above. Life was settled now ; it seemed permanent as the stone.

We came to a field with a barn in it ; and in a corner of that field the sheep lay where we had left her. Or rather she was feeding, resting on her front knees. Molly had a bottle of dressing and asked me to cast the sheep and hold her down while she applied it. I was thankful for the curly horns : they made such good handles. We treated her feet and dressed all the fly-blows. 'Ah,' said Molly, 'I like to see the "wicks" come tumbling out.'

After the rest and the treatment, the sheep walked better ; and we brought her home with comparatively few stops. They had already started dipping the flock when we returned. Rockfall had only his boy George, of fourteen, to help, so I was soon at it too. I spent the whole morning wrestling with sheep, not just tame fat sheep such as we have in hurdled folds in the south, but sheep used to galloping over rocks and fells. Again I was thankful for the curly horns. It was one desperate battling with a seething host packed within the fortress-like walls. Occasionally I looked up and saw the top of a great ash-tree, that grew far below, swaying soothingly in the breeze. Rockfall was doing the dipping, plunging each sheep into a narrow cement bath and holding it there, swilling it with the strong liquid, for three minutes. When I first came on the scene the village policeman was standing by the dip, but out of range of the great splashing struggle of it, watch in hand. He was there to see that the law about dipping was strictly complied with, that every sheep should spend three full minutes in the bath. He looked neat and dapper beside Rockfall, who was swathed in old mackintoshes tied with string, and looked like a mutilated brown paper parcel. Though a pessimist about some things, notably about the weather, he was an optimist in such matters as that a few strands of already rusty wire should hold a five-barred gate to a post against the weight of a

rush of sheep. The barrier dividing the dipped from the undipped, composed of a gate, hurdles, and oddments, threatened to collapse every time we grabbed a sheep.

By the end of the day the yard smelt as antiseptic as a hospital. There was a large steaming heap of manure in a corner of the middenstead, but not a whiff of it could break through the other. Not only the yard was disinfected, but the pasture to which the sheep were released. Honeysuckle and wild roses twined in the thicket of the beck: on the opposite side a meadow of mowing grass was carpeted with wild flowers. But nothing could you smell but disinfectant. Not till I stumbled stiff and half-asleep to bed that night, and pressed my face into the pillow and smelt the duck. I even welcomed that duck.

I returned to Suffolk soon afterwards; but I kept thinking of the kindly folk of Brant Farm who were so helpful to Nora living alone with the three children in Beck Mill. Though they were very busy, they would always ask her if there was anything she wanted from Kendal when they went to market: likewise one or other of the boys would often fetch her bread on his way from school. The baker's calls were few, and then he came no nearer Beck Mill than Mr. Ransom's farm at the top beside the road. With the extra ploughed land, they were desperately short of labour. There was not a single landless labourer in the whole parish of Fellside. In fact, labour and wages were on quite a different basis from what I was used to. A labourer—or 'farm servant' as he was called—was in Fellside the youngest son of one of the many small family farmers. If the family was bigger than the size of the farm warranted, he hired himself to one of the farmers whose family was not large enough for his land. It was a kind of apprenticeship to farming, though he seldom had much to learn about the job. He lived in, and received fifty pounds for the half-year,

which was the recognized period of his agreement. The term 'farm servant' had absolutely no derogatory significance : he lived exactly as the family ; was a friend of the family. There were no set hours of work : he undertook to help them run the farm for six months ; and the hours depended on the job. In the summer they were very long : the whole family worked together. The farm servant saved most of his wages, and in a few years could start on his own as a farmer.

The increased arable acreage meant that all sons were now wanted at home. I told the Rockfalls that if I harvested my hay in good time I would return and help them with theirs, as I saw that they were practically a month behind us in Suffolk.

It was July when I returned to Fellside ; and I found they had still only a small patch of grass cut. It had turned showery, and the cutting was held up.

Rockfall I found repairing a wall by his barn. Stones of all shapes and sizes lay scattered at his feet ; he was staring fixedly at them. He picked one up at last, and set it on the wall ; turned it over and tried it another way, sighed, threw it down, and stood staring fixedly at the heap as before. After a further minute of standing still as though he were thinking deeply, he chose another big stone and bedded it on the wall. At the third shifting of it he got it approximately to fit. He went through the same choosing and trying of stones for the edge of the wall, leaving the width of it to be filled. This he did with small stones fairly quickly. Then he started building up the outside again. It looked like trying to solve a jig-saw puzzle with pieces that never quite fitted ; and much of the time was spent standing absolutely still staring at the shapes of them. I tried my hand at the job, and found as in all other ancient crafts, a sort of sixth or instinctive sense entered into it, so that Rockfall's wall, despite the intractable shapes of the stones, looked well-knit. Every stone seemed inevitable in its place. The

difference between his section of wall and mine was that his looked as if some outside force had come, after it was built, and actually compressed the stones together, whereas mine looked to be the same stones as I took up just set one upon another. I took it down and started again. I might have known, I told myself, that if it took him such a time choosing the right stone for a place, I could not do it any more quickly. However, I began to get the knack of it, and earned his approval. It gave me an idea of what years it must have taken to build those walls across the fells; not walls on comparatively level ground, as this was, but up slopes on which a man himself could hardly stand squarely upright. Not only had there been the task of building, but the collecting and carrying of the stones.

'Ah,' Rockfall said, when I remarked on it, 'they didn't think aught of work in those days.'

From where we stood the view was green and lush, of a neighbour's valley, under a leaden sky. Down there they had already progressed with hay-making so far as to have a field of hay cocked.

'Ay,' said Rockfall regretfully, 'after all t'fine weather we've had, still we've hardly started on our hay. And now 'tis come wet. But we'll get nae sympathy.'

The family had been urging him to start cutting ever since I had left. 'But sheep have been such a trouble, and then there was kale and turnips wanted singling . . .'

There were still several short rows of carrots, which were smothered with chickweed. In this reddish friable soil, under moist skies, surface weeds tended to smother a young crop before it was advanced enough to hoe.

The next day was hot and sunny, and things began to dry a little. We weeded the carrots. We had hoes, but they proved almost useless: the damp earth and trailing weeds clogged the blades.

We had to go down on our hands and knees and crawl up the steep field. I thought Rockfall's big hands would pull out all the carrots with the weeds ; but his fingers worked quickly and skilfully. The carrots were Molly's. Eileen had hens : Molly had started growing vegetables with a view to selling them in the market. But Rockfall was not very hopeful about them. 'Too many wild things like carrots.'

In the afternoon Molly came out. Her coming was a sign for the clegs, or horseflies : they seemed to attack her especially. Her arms had several big bumps on them, and one eye was half-closed before we had finished. Yet I had hardly had a sting. Our tea was brought out to us in a basket, as is the way all summer in Fellside. Somebody in the farm-house always seemed to know which field the workers were in ; and somebody was usually at hand to send—George or Jimmy just back from school, or one of the girls home from market. To-day our tea appeared suddenly over the sky-line, brought by young George. We ate it under the wall, with a view of half the hayfields of Fellside, and farmers and their wives and families busy in them. Such a use they had for baskets : butter-baskets, egg-baskets, tea-baskets with lids ; all stout hand-woven baskets, of which every farm-house had a large stock.

We looked at our work. I encouraged Molly about the carrots. Freed at last, they looked ready to grow. In imagination I saw them being lifted in tender young bunches, and Molly carrying one of those flat, wide baskets crammed with them and other vegetables, getting into the market bus along with Eileen and her eggs. But there were many gaps in the rows, and these we considered might be filled with young plants of greens which Molly had grown in her patch of vegetable ground at the farm.

The next day came wet again. We spent the afternoon planting out the greens under mackin-

toshes and old coats. Again our tea appeared over the sky-line, just as though it had been fine. We sat on an iron plough and ate it, while the rain came down. It tasted as good as it did the day before.

My encouragement of the vegetable idea was not entirely altruistic. Ours is a vegetable-loving family, and our Suffolk ground produces them in abundance and variety. But up here I saw very few vegetables, and little garden space given to them. In Kendal they were scarce and dear. Lack of them would be felt by Nora, to whom cooking is an art, and herbs also, whose use and blending she understands. So I urged the planting of at least the basic sorts of vegetables, assuring Molly that the family at Beck Mill would be very good customers. When I saw the small rows of beans and peas she had sown for their big family, I realized that for all my telling she could have no idea of the quantities of vegetables we were used to eating.

The next day Rockfall came up from that field with the news that most of the plants we had put in that rainy afternoon had already been eaten by rabbits; and that our carrots, stripped of their protective mat of weeds, were now discovered and appreciated. Molly was not a girl to be daunted, and with a little encouragement came out with me that afternoon and planted the rows all over again. The carrots had not suffered a great deal: the greens had been more conspicuous. Bending for hours and enjoying a close-up view of stones and earth, one longed for a bit of distance; and thank heaven one had only to stretch one's back, and there were all the fells. At home, when on this sort of job, and with no farther view than the hedge of the field for relief, I have imagined myself at a height above earth, and ridge and furrow to be hill and valley, with Anthea as willing ally in the game. But the best vista of all here was the tea-basket at no great distance and rapidly approaching.

Once more our carrots-and-greens plantation looked promising. The thing now was to keep off rabbits, pigeons, rooks, and so forth. We returned to the farm as the milk was tinging into pails in the shippon, just in time for the fifth meal of the day, called 'six o'clock'. It consisted of milk that had been in the cow a minute before, and bread and butter, cheese and whatever was being taken out of the oven. The big oven, with a door like the door of a safe, was nearly always full; and somebody would be running to swing it open on its heavy ornamental hinges and clang it shut again. One member of the family was good at cakes, another at bread, a third at pasties or oatcakes; so all the women had separate interests in the oven, particularly on baking day. As far as I could judge, every day was baking day; but only two days in the week were given the name. On those days there were even more trays of eatables awaiting their turn, or brown and cooling on the flags: they were all over the floor, even under the dresser. How the family in their clogs moved about among them without obliterating a tray of tarts with a false step, was a wonder to me.

To-day was not a baking day, but Eileen was anxious about a cake she was baking, and some buns. The cake was rather a special one, for a prize at a whist drive. It was time to feed her fowls down at the mill: she must go or she would be late in getting ready for the whist drive: she daren't take the cake out yet or it would be 'sad'.

'I'll take it out for you,' Molly offered, 'in about a quarter of an hour.'

That did not end Eileen's anxiety: Molly would very likely forget. 'Will you be sure to remember?' Then she appealed to me: but I don't think she thought I had the look of one who would remember a cake in the oven, for she took a great red shawl that was lying on the sofa by the window and hung it from the mantelpiece. 'There now, that'll remind you.' It covered the whole front of the oven; was

in danger of being sucked up the chimney in flames, and its lower fringe missed by an inch two pails of separated milk on the hearth. Off went Eileen; but there was a great deal of business about the hearth just now. Calf gruel was being prepared on the hob: the big black kettle hanging on a hook was making the surprising amount of commotion an over-filled farm kettle on an open stove can make, clattering its lid, causing the fire to hiss and blow out ash, and sending forth such a jet of steam from its spout as made one revise one's idea of George Stephenson's genius in thinking it might drive something.

Molly's job at this time of the day was the calves. We were late owing to the planting: the calves were reported to have come to the gate at the usual time, but gone away again. I took Rover to search for them, while Molly prepared the gruel. When you went to look for stock on Brant Farm, it was not a walk, it was a climb. I came on them at last—or rather in sight of them. After I had climbed to the top meadow, I saw them at the bottom, disappointed of gruel, drinking in the beck. 'Come up!' I called. 'Co'up, co'up,' as I had many a time called my own. They stared apathetically. I found I was at a disadvantage in not knowing the language—the local beast language.

Rover looked at the calves far away down there; then he looked at me: I looked at him. I am sure he understood. I told him, in the only language I knew, to go down there and fetch up the calves. It was Suffolk lingo, and it savoured perhaps of a man with a gun sending a retriever after a pheasant he thinks he has winged. Old Rover just looked at me 'dunt' as we say at home. But he was not dunt; oh no! It was rough going, and almost sheer, down to the calves.

I climbed down, from one terraced sheep-track to another, the sort of exercise that jams your toes into the ends of your boots, and makes your

knee-joints plead for mercy. Occasionally I stopped and gave my Suffolk call again in vain. I had almost reached them when I heard Molly's voice from the farm above. 'Sook, sook, sook !' (suck ?). The calves galloped up the path to the gate, arriving there as Molly appeared with a pail in either hand. I memorized that word, and tone, as I toiled upward again.

Molly in her sky-blue frock, with brimming pails for six ravenous calves, opened the gate, and met them full force. She fended some off, letting three drink, keeping three at bay : at the right moment making the three drinking give place to the three thirsting, armed only with a short stick.

All were fed : hardly a drop spilt. The infant bull, only just past the calf stage himself, to whom the call still appealed, had been an additional last-minute adversary.

Back in the farm kitchen. Enter Mrs. Rockfall from the milking. 'Whatever's *that* thing doing there ?'

'Oh Lor'—Eileen's cake !'

I felt half to blame, and was anxiously behind Molly at the oven. It was burnt a bit on one side. Eileen was slowly returning with her eggs from the mill. We took ourselves off to see about keeping the rabbits off the carrots with netting.

The following day the hay-cutting started in earnest. Rockfall went out in the morning leading his horses with one hand, and carrying his big brown tea-pot in the other. He had two horses, Jack and Willie. Willie he had bred, but Jack he had bought the previous year, five years old, and described as broken to all work.

Since an abortive attempt to put him in a cart, he had done nothing but a little ploughing. Now was his chance to prove useful. Rockfall got them both harnessed to the pole of the grass machine, laid his tea-pot well out of hoof-range in the hedge, and mounted the seat. .

'Jack—Willie!' he called encouragingly. At the first click of the machine Jack flinched and backed. The more Rockfall called 'Jack—Willie! Gee-up!' the farther Jack retreated, till the mower was jammed against the hedge. Rockfall put the machine out of gear, got down from the seat, and went to the horses, leading them again to the starting-place. He had a drink of tea and tried again. The result was the same as before. In three minutes the machine was back in the hedge. The more he flourished the reins the more the horse recoiled: he shouted at Jack, but it made no difference. Then his brother Harvey, hearing the noise, came out from his farm.

Harvey was a square, fair, middle-aged man, strong and alert. As soon as he took hold of Jack's bridle a change came over things. He spoke to the horse, joked to me and Rockfall, but his grip was strong, and he was attentive to the nature of the horse. He did not do anything much for a minute or two, but holding the bridle in one hand, smoothed the other down the neck, shoulder, and flank of the animal as though appraising him. Then, suddenly, he started him off: and away they went, twice round the field at a great pace, Harvey trotting along beside Jack, the hob-nails of his boots shining up. Then he stopped him: Jack was sweating and panting.

Rockfall got down from his seat, and went to Jack's head and patted it. 'There,' he said, in that endearing murmur that could come so surprisingly from his rugged exterior, 'we don't want to tire thee out. There's naught to be afraid of after all, is there?' He chanted to the horse like this for several minutes, and all went well for the rest of the day.

But early next morning I met Mrs. Rockfall limping home from the field. 'Hey—that great clumsy creature,' she cried, 'I had to go and give him a start with it. 'T trod on my bad foot too.'

All day Rockfall mowed round the long meadow but a good deal of grass was left at the sides; also

a big odd-shaped patch at one end. 'Piking', they called it : any odd patch to be mown by hand was 'piking'. Next day Rockfall was at it with his scythe—or 'ley' as it was called here. A regular array of these hung over a beam in the middenstead ; ancestral, some of them looked. I chose one, found the handles at totally unfamiliar angles. I still don't know why : are the people made differently ? Rockfall seemed to scythe in the usual way. It was a Saturday. The two boys, George and young Jimmy, lay on their backs in the new-mown grass, the dogs beside them. They had forks with which to shake out or 'scale' the grass as we cut it. Rockfall complained of the heat ; but he was happy scything. 'I hate sitting on the seat of that machine,' he said. He scythed like a man in his element, swinging, black-haired, ahead of me—his rhythmic movement somehow harmonizing with the great still height of the Beacon that was his background. He was quick to notice a bird fly up from the long grass under the hedge. He found the nest. 'Twill not come back again,' George said. 'Ay, 'twill,' his father answered ; 'if I don't mow too close.' He mowed carefully round the nest. That set him talking about birds. I found he had a good knowledge of them, and a disinterested pleasure in them, particularly the small ones. Birds like pigeons, rooks, and wild ducks, of course, came into the picture of farming, and were shot, either because of the mischief they did or for food. The small birds, though, he seemed fond of watching for their own sakes, and had many stories of them, which made pleasant pauses as we returned at the end of our swathes to start again.

'Once,' he said, 'I was harrowing in kale field, and I came on a lapwing's nest. I took t'eggs and laid them on one side, then put them back again where they'd been ; and t'bird came back to them that night.'

CHAPTER FIVE

Everything almost was done by hand on Brant Farm; and when you stood on the steep Brow, with the farmstead on your right, and little Beck Mill with its buildings laid out like a plan sheer below, you saw what was practically a self-contained organism. Occasionally an agricultural magazine found its way into the house, to join the pile under the cushion on the leather sofa; but its pictures of mechanical hay-sweeps, hoists, elevators, grinding machinery, had no more to do with the life here than the high-road that passed apparently so near, yet was cut off completely from the farm by the beck and its steep-sided valley.

In the parlour with its big carved chimney-beam was a photograph of Samuel Switch, the hard good farmer of Brant Farm of a former generation. He was the father of Mrs. Rockfall's first husband: that was how Brant Farm came into the Rockfall family. He sat in his stiff suit, grave and upright, a twisted stick between his knees, his sheep-dog at his feet; and made the photographer's stock background of park and pillars look ridiculous. I imagined how those feet had rung on these grey flags, and were probably in contact with a carpet for the first and last time in that picture.

In the stables were faded coloured cards of First Prize—Second Prize—Third Prize. But the First-Prize cards were the most numerous. On the side-board under the portrait stood a row of silver cups which his daughter-in-law kept gleaming. It was he and not modern conditions that ruled the farm. Yes, still, from his high place sitting there among his trophies. The best-managed farm in Fellside—that reputation still held, and kept them at it; though no longer was the household stirring at half-past four in the morning to his summons.

But a fine Monday morning of summer-time, with

baking, washing, hay in the field, sheep to be driven to the fell : the place was humming and clattering early enough then. These fell farms clatter awake ; clogs on cobbles, pails ringing like bells in stone shippens ; whereas in Suffolk the farm rustles itself into activity out of a bed of straw.

Brant Farm has a tiny plat of garden before it, a narrow lawn ; and then the ground plunges down into a lake of mist, leaving Brant Farm alone in the sun's eye—the rising sun. It breaks out in a clear glory as I come up from the beck, from Beck Mill, where all is indistinct and groping yet. The farm is a grey-walled fortress floating on white mist. There is no world visible, no fields. The bleating of sheep, the voices of cattle and people here, make it an ark detached and adrift. The sun shines into the kitchen where Molly is lighting the fire. It won't let her light it. 'We always have to draw the curtains to light the fire,' she says, and goes to the window and draws them. She is persuaded that the sun puts the fire out. Morning shines through the thin stuff : only the direct beam is cut off. A tongue of flame in the grate becomes visible. Molly goes running out, and comes back with enough twigs to light a townswoman's fire for a week, and throws them on. In a moment the whole stove springs to life. Molly is kneeling before it in the veiled room, gathering up the ashes, polishing the steel hinges of the great oven door. Smoke from such stoves is rising from a hundred chimneys thus early ; a hundred Mollys or their mothers are tending the flame : it is a ritual of use. It is a thrifty stove, like the Fellside people, who handle little money. It is made to burn wood chiefly. Great branches are dragged in and stood up the chimney, their butts in the fire. An iron crane reaches across it on which are hung pots and kettles. Every utensil has a hanging handle.

Molly opens the curtains again : ash-dust floats in the sunbeams.

'Phew—what a scrow !' she cries, surveying the

room, and bustles about trying to clear it up. Often in the course of a day one or other of the womenfolk will come in, look around and cry, 'What a scrow in here !' and start clearing up. But always something imperative will call them away, and so the room remains as it was. Molly suddenly remembers the kettle is not on, and runs out to fill it. Down some steps is another little room, opposite the yard door, a sort of scullery, which they call the back-kitchen. Here Mrs. Rockfall is stationed already at the separator. The fact that she is in the back-kitchen means that no one else can get in comfortably, for never was so small a space crammed with the implements of so many activities—butter-worker, churn, separator, pump, sink, home-made hot-water system (Mrs. Rockfall's invention); even an oil cooking-stove, in case the kitchen stove is crowded to capacity and yet another pot requires a place.

Bump goes the door against Mrs. Rockfall's left foot. Mrs. Rockfall's figure is swinging to and fro cranking up the separator; but the foot never budes. Molly can just squeeze in. The little space is ringing and shrieking with the noise of the separator. No sooner has Molly got to the pump than the door crashes against Mrs. Rockfall's foot again. This time it is her husband coming in with two more pails of milk. The foot in its brass-buckled clog remains the pivot: the pails are swung somehow round Mrs. Rockfall's roundness and come to rest somewhere. Mr. Rockfall wears a pair of breeches with two large panels of patches let into the knees. His black hair is ruffled. His features look as though they have been moulded by the wind. After him comes young George: his mother has let go the handle of the separator, and is stooping with a jug under the cream spout. Her bending compresses Molly against the sink: George reaches across and catches hold of the handle, and restores the speed.

'I never get comfortably settled in here to separating but everybody wants to come in,' Mrs. Rockfall is heard to cry above the din.

'Well, I must get some water in t'kettle,' Molly exclaims, trying to work the pump, which prods her father in the ribs.

'Eh, but you should have done that afore. Now here's t'blue milk ready for calves and all.'

Somehow the people manage to get themselves extricated. Mrs. Rockfall's clog has not conceded an inch : this is her hive.

Thrift and work and food : it has gone on for generations among these stone walls. Now it is her generation : she has been true to it, and it is passing.

The breakfast-table fills the room when the flaps are up : they often are. Home-made bread, brown and white, home-made butter, porridge, and home-cured bacon : breakfast is soon over. Eileen has gone down to feed her fowls : Molly is getting ready to bake.

Outside there is a bleating of sheep and clatter of clogs. All the farm tracks bear their curiously pointed impress. Suddenly the mist clears from below, and sunlight floods the moist valley.

We had fetched the sheep into the yard. Rockfall, with George, was sorting the lambs. He had his shears in his hand, shining and sharp. He gazed at the mass of fleeces, absorbed, automatically opening and closing the shears, snipping the air all the time. Suddenly he would make a grab at one ; or merely point and George would seize it by the horns, half drag it, half be dragged by it. His father then trimmed the wool around its docked tail, and it was pushed into the shippin. He picked up the fallen wisps of wool from the miry stones with as much care as if he were tidying a carpet. Mrs. Rockfall was now standing in the middenstead as spectator of all this ; only she was too busy washing to look, except at moments.

The middenstead was the hub of the farm ; a roofed-in sort of collonade with stone posts. Here was the midden, whence it took its name. Complementary to the heap of cow-manure in one corner was a heap of coals in another. Here, too, was the sheep-dip ; branches, logs, and sawing-horse ; forks, rakes, scythes ; two carts, an old gig, and at the end opposite to that which was bounded by the garden wall, twin coppers set in a square block of concrete, with a little roof and drain-pipe chimney : an erection about the size and shape of a market stall. A wringer stood near, and all around, draped over the heaps of logs, were shirts, sheets, breeches, stockings—every manner of thing to be washed. A wood fire was roaring in the grate. Mrs. Rockfall shoved in more and yet more wood, till the coppers began to steam and bubble. Whole cauldrons full of boiling water might have been pitched over the low outer wall of the middenstead on to the heads of any who attempted to storm Brant Farm. Mrs. Rockfall looked like its defender.

She lifted the lid of a copper, revealing a seething mass of linen ; took out a garment with a pair of wooden tongs and put in a garment, stirred and shoved and clamped on the lid again. Then she set to work on the breeches in a zinc bath, rubbing and pummelling.

George called across, 'Can't find Jimmy's lamb, Mother ; 'tmust have died on t'fell.' Jimmy had made a pet of an orphan lamb, which was now a grown ewe and missing. 'We found it last year I remember.' They marked it specially ; but now it was not here. The great bare height of the Beacon stood up against the sky, where sheep might die alone and never be found.

George was talking to his mother. All the lambs were sorted : his father stooped, collecting the last snippings of wool from the trampled ground. The door of the shippoon must have been ajar, for when we turned again at a cry from Rockfall, we saw the

last of the lambs trotting out and mingling with the ewes again. 'Ah! George, ye've gone and let them all out. All our work gone for nothing.'

We had to start to sort them all over again.

At last it was done the second time; and the ewes were turned out down the steep stony track to the beck, past the mill, and on and away towards the shoulder of the Beacon, out of the landscape of men to the solitudes of the fell. Once you had been up there, the sheep seemed to bring something of the quality of that place with them down to the farm, the wild to the cultivated, mingling the two. They were a tide that flowed to and fro. As the sheep passed out of the yard, after their brief stay, Rockfall stood at the gate and counted them yet again, jabbing the air with his forefinger at each, and mouthing to himself, like a schoolboy doing a difficult sum. Once again the curtled note-book was brought out of his pocket in a cocoon of string, and the stub of pencil. After holding this cramped in his big fingers to note down the numbers, he turned, and with a great sweep of the arm as though in relief, sent Flash around the sheep already scattering across the Brow. In a glad gallop, doing the right thing for once, Flash bunched them again as swiftly as the tightening of a noose. George went in front: father with his tar-pot and crook followed behind. Mrs. Rockfall and I looked at each other, and looked at the sky. The farm was left to us for the morning.

In the kitchen Molly was still kneeling in front of the fire. Now she had a basin of flour in front of her, jugs of milk and buttermilk beside her. No basin was ever quite big enough for the Rockfall family's needs. This one was filled with flour enough for eight loaves: but they would not last long. Molly had a little pool of buttermilk in the middle of it, and gradually was moistening the whole, without the flour puffing all over the room. Eileen came back from her hens; and soon the kitchen took on the

appearance of a bakehouse. Not only loaves, but tins of buns and pasties lay about on chairs, on the sofa, and on the floor. Mrs. Rockfall was in her little back-kitchen again. Eileen came looking round the door. Eileen was erect, self-contained: she always carried her elbows close to her sides. Molly was usually reaching half across the room in an endeavour to do two things at once.

Eileen asked her mother, 'Where's t'Flit? There's such a swarm of flies in kitchen.'

'You don't want to be troubling after that now,' said Mrs. Rockfall. 'Get t'work done, we'll be wanted in hayfield after dinner—maybe before.'

The sun was bright and strong. As she looked out, she caught sight of young Jimmy going by. As usual he had torn his trousers. He was eating something: he was always eating.

'Hey! what have you been up to?' Mrs. Rockfall hauled him into the back porch and surveyed the damage. 'Why, you've torn seat right out of them. And do your buttons up: don't let me ever see you going about like that again.' She hitched the trousers round him; his hand kept travelling between pocket and mouth. 'What are you eating?' They were green gooseberries, hard and sour. Meanwhile a hen had walked in and begun to climb the steps to the kitchen. A tin of tarts lay on the top step. The hen cocked her head on one side and examined them with her right eye. She jabbed at one with her beak; speared it. Surprised to find the whole thing come up on her beak, she turned intent only on making a get-away with it. She had just got to Mrs. Rockfall when the tart fell at her feet. Mrs. Rockfall cuffed the hen and replaced the tart; still holding on to Jimmy with the other hand.

Eileen cried, 'He's got those gooseberries from t'mill garden. There's a bush by beck fair covered. He'll have t'lot if they aren't picked.'

In this busy life, if there was a bush of fruit that looked like going to waste, or a good piece of

firewood washed down the beck by the rains, it was Eileen who noticed it.

I asked Mrs. Rockfall, 'What about the haycocks in the Long Field? Shall I be turning them over? They'd dry well now.' Some of the hay had at last been cocked; but it had rained hard for two days since, and they must have got wet. The sky was cloudless, and it looked like being fine all day after the early mist. At least in Suffolk it would have been fine. 'But you know best about your weather here,' I said.

She looked up into the sky. I knew she was bustling to get out into the field and have the cocks turned and drying before her husband came back from the fell. 'Ay, t'weather's all right: we might lead some home to-day yet, if we get to it early.'

In the kitchen we could hear a dispute going on between the girls. It was Eileen's chickens that were the trouble. 'They've been in my garden again, pecking all my greens and scratting up t'rows of lettuce seeds,' Molly complained.

'Well, I've moved them once right down to hen-hut by beck; but t'others wouldn't let them go in to roost, so they all came back.'

'Well, they'll have to go somewhere.'

'Eh,' sighed Mrs. Rockfall; 'I wish one of them had been a lad and worked out-doors; then there'd be no disputing. Eileen!' she called, 'go and help shake out t'cocks in Long Field: if we don't get it dry, 'twill never be fit to lead. I'll be out soon.'

So Eileen and I took forks and made our way to the Long Field. It was very hot now: there was not a breath of wind. A milky haze stood between us and the Beacon. The paycocks were heavy and spongy. We heaved them over, turning the bottoms to the sun. The field was steamy under a high hedge: stone-wall boundaries occurred mostly on the higher ground.

'Phew! I'm sweating already,' Eileen exclaimed. She wore a green frock, short and loose, and canvas shoes on bare feet. 'I wish I'd brought a hat.'

Soon Mrs. Rockfall joined us. In her clogs, with a scarf round her head and armed with a fork, she looked like a mother of the Revolution. She set to work on the cocks, shaking them out.

'I thought you said we were to turn t'cocks over just, not scale them out,' Eileen said.

'Eh, but 'tis no use half-doing it,' she was heard to reply through pantings of exertion. More than ever in work her voice had that way of evaporating after a ringing start. She spoke in short bursts through the turmoil of hay. 'Some folk—they never half shake t'cocks out—in too much of a hurry—come to theirs, they're like porridge. "No thanks, I'll scale my own", I say.'

There were variations in the wetness of the cocks. Eileen, always concerned to do the best possible, to save the most, wondered whether we shouldn't have started on those on the farther side of the field, which we had just reached and found wetter than the others. Her mother whisked the question aside with an extra vigorous twist of her fork in a cock, rolling it over and letting its dark underside glisten in the sun. Blessed the sun was, licking up all that rotting moisture from the withered leaves and stems.

We had shaken out about half the cocks in the field. Instead of heaps, there was now a pattern of long shaken bolsters of hay. Suddenly John Rockfall appeared in the farther gateway. He advanced towards us. I glanced at the amount we had done in so short a time, and expected he would be pleased.

'This is a gay day,' he said.

I did not at first catch the irony implicit in his tone, and wondered at his wife's rejoinder, 'Why, what's t'matter with it?'

'Up on t'fell 'twas that faint and lishy, I said to myself there's one thing I hope, they've not gone interfering with t'cocks in Long Field. I feared it though, and sent George on alone with sheep.'

It seemed a strange remark to make with the sunlight in a cloudless sky after early mist; and for

a minute it took all the go out of me. But not from Mrs. Rockfall, who cried, 'Eh, but what's t'matter with you, man?' and plied her fork more vigorously than before.

'Twill thunder before these are half-dry, and once t'cocks are moved they'll not keep rain out any more.'

'Keep rain out—why these are wet right to bottom as 'tis. Come on, faint-heart!'

For a moment I wondered what was going to happen. I knew that the farm had been Mrs. Rockfall's before he had come to it: as a widow she had run it for two or three years herself. Yet I knew him for a man of strength of purpose. He stood there before us with a sort of granite obduracy. I must admit my fork faltered in the work when he had spoken; but then, seeing that his wife continued as before, and hearing how she rallied him, I carried on beside her and Eileen on the other side. We were quickly approaching where he stood, and I saw myself having to scatter wet hay all around him in a sort of defiance. But then, with a smile, he turned, and exchanged his crook for a hayfork that was leaning by the hedge, and set to work. Our pace was vigorous, but once he started he worked like a tornado, rolling out the cocks to right and left.

'Will it be fit to lead after dinner?' Eileen asked.

'Fit to lead? No, not before tea-time,' Rockfall said, and swept on ahead. He had reached the end of the field, and was returning along the last row. The last cock was shaken out, and we stood, resting on our forks.

'What's to do now? Scale it out?' Eileen asked.

I looked to Mrs. Rockfall; but she now was looking to him.

'Oh ay—I suppose so,' Rockfall answered, and immediately set to work. Now we worked in line, walking backwards, scooping up the hay on our forks as we went, shaking it vigorously so that it was continuously falling and covering the whole of

the ground in a thin layer. When we had done that we stood again. We felt the hay. 'It's getting dry,' I said hopefully. But Eileen cried, 'There's some here as full of water as can be.'

'Tis nae use,' proclaimed Rockfall. 'Therè's not a breath of wind to dry it.' And he stood as though the springs of action were dried up in him. 'Ah, well——' He went to the gate, and by exchanging his fork for a rake left us to infer that he intended to turn it. So we fetched rakes, and formed in a new order, and went with a new rhythm. Instead of the intolerant-looking shaking of it off the forks as a dog scatters water from its head, there was the light regular lift and snatching motion of the rakes as we went in echelon, leaving a pattern of swathes behind us like little waves. The slow striding that accompanied this motion gave it a nonchalant easy look; but Eileen coming last was becoming tired by the effort to keep up.

'Turn it, don't drag it,' her father said, quick to notice that her action had lost its light upward pull, and was becoming loose and clawing. 'Better do it slowly, and turn it properly.'

We gathered by the hedge near the gateway to lay up our rakes, for it was dinner-time when we had finished turning the hay. Mrs. Rockfall rallied her husband on not having new rakes ready for the hay-making.

'These are a pretty set of tools—look at them!' We showed our rakes, and a gap-toothed dissipated collection they looked—bows broken, heads askew. I am not sure but that I hadn't snapped a tooth of mine carelessly, in the effort of keeping up with Rockfall. We had to smile at our array of them—Mrs. Rockfall, and John Rockfall too.

'Well, I've ordered new,' he murmured.

'In time for corn harvest,' his wife suggested. But the sarcasm was without sting. The main thing was, we had all got going at the hay, and the sun still shone as unclouded as ever, and it was drying.

'Well,' John Rockfall began, as though justifying the old rakes, 'when I was a lad at home we used to take every other tooth out of t'rakes to turn t'seeds.'

'Seeds' were what we in Suffolk called 'stover'—clover-hay, which was often long and matted, and apt to tangle in the rakes.

They had several acres of clover to get : it was a long way from the farm, and as the cocks were now soaked, it was a cause of anxiety.

'Old Mr. Switch,' Mrs. Rockfall said, 'always had bran-new rakes ready for harvest : I don't know what he'd say to this lot.'

We were walking back to the farm for dinner. As we went, Eileen said to her father, 'Why don't you put Willie in hay-turner and do it ? There's he galloping about t'field and hay-turner standing in mill barn, and we have to do it by hand.'

I heard her father murmur something about, 'Break machine all to bits on these bumpy fields'. He said to me as we went in, 'I hate machines. We've only one on t'farm, and that's always going wrong.'

''Tis because you don't understand them,' his wife called over her shoulder. 'Why don't you borrow Mr. Twisgill's scaler and save all that work ?'

'Last time I did, it broke, and 'twould get broke again. Mower's bad enough : 'tis always coming up against a stone. I'd do anything rather than sit on that blooming seat all day.'

John Rockfall hated machinery with a downright physical hatred. He liked any excuse to mow with a scythe rather than with horses and mower, saying, 'That's an awkward corner and 'twill be just as quick to do by hand', or, 'There's a boggy place there and t'horses will get set fast'; making of that corner a slice, so that only the middle rectangle of the field remained. His stony tracks and bumpy fields were friendly to him till he tried to work a machine on them : then they became inimical. The rocks jolted and broke iron castings : the slopes threw the turner out of gear. He hated being a passive

spectator of the machine, sitting on the seat. He hated having to fiddle with it. He always wanted to go straight at a job, and felt that to start right away with a scythe was quicker than catching the horses, oiling and preparing the machine; even though once started it would do the work in less than half the time—if it met with no accident.

CHAPTER SIX

Dinner was hearty and brief: no 'dinner hour'. The Rockfall family were adept at eating a great deal in a very little while. The meal was easily served. A big square meat-and-potato pie was put on the table: Mrs. Rockfall took up the long, black-handled knife. 'How many are there?' She counted us, and cut the pie accordingly.

There are three different things going on during dinner: eating, talking, and wireless news—besides, of course, the unceasing business of the stove. About half the loaves, pasties, buns lying about the room at the feet of the diners are now baked brown, and half still white, waiting for the oven. The voice of the broadcaster persists, suave but swamped by the hard hill dialect. Somebody shuts it off.

'Doesna' sound too good, eh?' John Rockfall remarks, coming up from a big bite. The others are silent a moment. 'What was it?' asks Eileen, who is seated by the door.

'Yon fellow says t'Jerries have——' Rockfall rubs his shock-head. 'I didna' hear exactly. You were making such a row with taking things out of t'oven,' he says to his wife.

'I wasn't listening,' she replies. 'Had my head half-way up t'chimney.'

Molly has the only definite fact (she is sitting nearest the radio): that twenty aeroplanes have been destroyed. German or British? is the enquiry, under

which she is silent. There is general dissatisfaction with her on this account. 'That's no use to know, then.'

'Well, I can't help it: I'm only telling what I heard him say. You should have been listening yourselves if you wanted to know.'

'It didna' sound too good, anyways,' says the master of the house again; and they leave it at that.

The boys Jimmy and George are curious about the children at Beck Mill, and ask me are they coming into the hayfield to have their tea? Jimmy tells me that after picking the gooseberries at Beck Mill (in an inaccessible spot overhanging the beck), he gave some to Martin and Anthea.

'Did they eat them?' I ask in some apprehension.

'Martin did—he put one in his mouth.'

I only hope he had the sense to dislike the hard, sour object in time to spit it out; and wonder if Nora is now coping with his belly-ache.

'Anthea didn't like them,' Jimmy adds, in a tone of surprise. 'But I picked her some wild strawberries: she liked them.'

'Now you're not to go making a nuisance of yourself down there,' Mrs. Rockfall says.

Jimmy gravitates down there whenever he is not at school: bounces his ball against the wall to attract their attention, and out they run; then he performs antics for them on the plank bridge, walking on the rails, or turning somersaults. We expect any day to have to render first aid to a concussed, half-drowned Jimmy.

Just as we are finishing dinner, all interest centres on a small object seen through the window. It is no bigger than a fly crawling across the pane: it is a horse and cart moving over a pasture some distance away.

'Tis Twisgill's!' they exclaim. It is proceeding towards rows of hay that lie drying in the sun.

'They're going to lead it, looks like.'

'They'd not started to turn it out of cocks, when we went to ours.'

'Then ours must be fit if theirs is.'

'That field catches more air than our field,' John Rockfall says, still refusing to be optimistic about the prospects of the day.

The seasonal doings of Twisgill, I found, were of great interest to the family, as a measure of their own. Twisgill had about the same standards of husbandry as they themselves, neither over-impetuous nor too cautious, doing things at the proper time. So this window, containing a picture of his farming, was of daily importance to them.

Just then Tom Paterson arrived: we heard his footsteps ringing in the yard. I was surprised, on hearing those steps first, to meet a young man with rather a pale, studious face, wearing glasses. He had a small, and to my view delectable little farm in a bosky valley, at the junction of two becks. His farmstead was tucked into the valley-side out of the wind, but full in the sun. He had an orchard, a treasure here, hanging down a slope that was too steep for husbandry; a bonny young wife, and a child. There was no road to his farm, only a gated track through meadows. But that did not mean, as it does in Suffolk, that he was cut off from wheeled communication with the outer world from November to March; for the stones under the turf made the track as hard as any road at all seasons. I have always been amused at what the Rockfalls considered a mire: at most it was two or three inches of mud over the stones. They were amazed when I tried to convey to them the bottomless morass that our farm tracks become, so that you can only cart manure in a hard frost. It seemed to them that farming must be paralysed.

Tom Paterson's farm being only twenty acres, he hired himself to Rockfall for half-days in the busy times. That was all the outside labour they had been able to obtain this year, and Tom Paterson of course only came when he had carted his own hay.

We all emerged from the house as he came across

the yard, and strode off together towards Long Field, rolling up our sleeves as we went. Molly came out with us this time, leaving Eileen (after a brief argument) to wash up and prepare the tea. On her way Molly stopped at one of the buildings, and disappeared into a low dark interior to attend to a sick calf.

In the field we took forks, to give the hay yet another shaking up. If the air would not move against the hay, to dry it, then the hay must be moved against the air. It was a mighty bout, this last one: all the meat pie and pasty we had eaten seemed turned at once to energy. We shook the hay on our forks, whisking and whirling it shred from shred, scooping up more from the ground while that which was last on our forks was still falling, so that a continuous windy curtain of hay billowed before us.

There was something domestic and familiar in the way of the women at it, as though shaking insubstantial mats on their doorsteps: the men swung to it from the hips, swinging backwards and scooping forward again, not finding enough to satisfy their forks at their feet. There was something teasing about the wispiess of it: the men could never gather up enough: they threshed it out till it lay scattered all over the ground. I had never experienced such a thorough hay-making: in our Suffolk climate the hay would have been spoiled, laid out so thin; scorched brittle.

All the while as we worked we walked backwards in line, retreating before our whirlwind of the hay, our human-made gale. And out of the cloud of the hay, in contrast to its agitation, came quiet matter-of-fact conversation.

'How's Jeannie?'

'She's well, thanks—and Rosie. Had a bit of bad luck Saturday though,' Tom adds. 'Somebody set their foot in her basket of eggs in t'bus going to market.'

'Oh dear, and eggs making a good price and all. Was there many broke?'

'Goodish few. Floor of bus was fair swimming.'

'How do t'plums hang in your orchard?'

'Hang thick: there'll be a good picking—soon as we've got t'hay.'

'I dare say you'll keep yourselves busy.' Mrs. Rockfall paused a moment and stood, smiling as with all her body, surveying from the bleaker heights of Brant Farm and middle-age the two young people in their fruitful snug little holding.

She glanced up at the fell. 'If t'Beacon looks close 'tmeans rain, and if it looks a long way off 'tmeans fair weather.'

The others glanced up, and some said it looked close and others distant. The sky, in any case, had come over heavy and threatening.

The hay was at last fit to carry, lying scattered thinly over the whole field, liable also to be thoroughly soaked again, after all our work, by five minutes of downpour.

'I said it was nae use,' John Rockfall exclaimed, leaning heavily on his fork and looking at the sky.

'Eh, man, gracious me, send and get cart and let's get at it,' his wife chided. John went off to find and catch Willie and harness him to the cart. I went up the hill with him to fetch the big rake, the 'Jinny' rake they called it, with which to rake up the hay that the pitchers' forks left behind the load. As I turned again, with the rake on my shoulder, I was struck by the whole scene spread out before me. Rolling fields, ribbons of walls, woody thicks beside becks, white farmsteads; and then increasing bareness as the ground rose out of man's dominion to the solitude of the fells. This scene, expressive both of domesticity and eternal wildness, gave to the traditional work they were at down there the measure of a ceremony. They were going in file again now, performing what is called 'putting in' the scattered hay; raking swathe on to swathe, and those following raking double swathe on to double swathe, till great rolls lay the length of the field, a cart-width

apart. They did it with a stride and a thrust of the rake, and a cross-swing of the leg that rolled the heavy swathe over like a wave. Though I knew it was hard work, it had a grace that looked effortless as they trod the rich green carpet of aftermath. They seemed to have been born to that sway, swinging even in the womb as their mothers swung to the work, expressing something which was both human and eternal in the scene.

Soon John Rockfall returned with Willie pulling a small bright-red cart over the sward. Even in the comparative level of Long Field, the ground rose and fell like a swell of the sea. The hills made it necessary to have only small light carts, and beautiful things the people made of them, with shallow curved bodies. When I first saw them, I was surprised that such rugged and difficult country should be the condition of such grace.

Willie was a tall, big-boned horse, and behind him the little cart, so gaily red in the grass, looked like a toy as it came towards us. We at once began forking up the hay into it. I experienced then what must be a usual thing with them, the feeling of harvest shaken out and exposed to a malevolent sky. One could almost feel the rain that impended, while getting one small forkful after another to safety, though each was as much as Tom or I could lift, and John Rockfall embrace, as he stood up in the cart with outspread arms and gathered them off the tines.

Molly harnessed herself to the big 'Jinny' rake, and dragged it to and fro across the wake of the cart, so that every wisp was gathered up. Mrs. Rockfall was some distance ahead, putting more of the hay into double rows ready for carting.

I was surprised when John Rockfall said, 'That'll be enough', as I put up a forkful. Till I remembered the hill to be climbed to the barn. 'Three rounds' (i.e. three forked layers), was the regular load in Fellside. Looking at the little cart with its little

load I began to realize the magnitude of the task that the double harvest of hay and corn meant here. Mrs. Rockfall suggested that we might get on better if we got the other cart going while it was yet fine. But her husband, with a vivid reminder of what happened the last time they had tried to harness Jack in shafts, was certain we should get more up by concentrating on the one cart with Willie. Just as we had got the first load, Eileen appeared with a large basket on her arm and a bedroom jug in the other hand. The jug was full of tea. I heard Mrs. Rockfall ahead of us ask her, 'How's t'calf?'

'Its ears are warm yet,' Eileen replied, not too hopefully.

'If only he'd put iodine on their navels when they're born, like I used to do. I never lost one of that trouble,' her mother said. She turned to us. 'Come on—tea.'

'Tea', we called to Molly away back there on the rake. The effect of that monosyllable was instantaneous. Hard workers they are in Fellside—obstinate workers; but at the cry of food everything stops as though a current were switched off; forks are thrust into the ground, coats pulled on. We all converged towards the food-basket and jug, which Molly was unpacking. Dragging some hay to sit on, we flopped down under the hedge. Although the meal was so brief, they did not eat it just anywhere, anyhow, but chose their spot, always for pleasantness, and there made a couch of hay.

Tom Paterson took off his cap, wiped his brow, and leaned back with an 'Ah!', prepared to enjoy the good things coming out of the basket. Almost immediately he jumped upright, nearly upsetting the jug, slapped the back of his head and began flipping at his ears.

'Whatever's t'matter man?'

'Something's stinging me.'

'Why, look,' shout Jimmy and George just back

from school; 'tis flying ants—air's fair swarmed with 'em.'

'Don't make such a fuss,' cries Molly. 'Oh, they're down my neck!' She begins wrenching at the bosom of her frock. Eileen has them in her hair, and the whole tea-party is in a turmoil, the boys dancing around in alternate merriment at others' plight, and with shrieks for help when attacked themselves. Mrs. Rockfall has firm hold of the basket and jug, occasionally sparing a hand to flick away some from her face and neck.

'Why, Dad, they're all over you!' the boys cry.

Rockfall looks up out of his mug of tea. 'Whatever's all t'fuss about?'

'Flying ants—there's hundreds on your face and hands.'

He spares a glance at one of his hands, the back of it crowded with the insects; then returns to the munching of a great slice of bread and jam, and his mug of tea. Flying ants could make no impression on his skin.

For some reason, I alone was unmolested by the creatures. I think because I was sitting next to Molly. Molly seemed to draw off all stinging creatures to herself.

What with stinging ants and the threatening sky, tea was even briefer than usual. We were forking the second load when the figure of brother Harvey appeared in a meadow in front of his farm-house nearly half a mile away. He shouted something which I could not understand. Although he stood a long way off, the hollow of the hills amplified his voice so that it swept across to us, but confused by echoes.

'Harvey says he's got some of that stuff that cured his calf, if you'd like to try it,' Mrs. Rockfall passed the news on to her husband on the cart at the farther side of the field. A long discussion of calf troubles was shouted to and fro, with Mrs. Rockfall relaying. Lastly the voice prophesied that

it would rain before that load was home. But we got that load and yet another. The sky looked darker than ever, but still it did not rain. There was a sort of motion in the storm-brew, a slow swirling around the Beacon. Milking-time came; but we did not stop to milk. Another load, and it was time for 'six o'clock': but we did not stop for 'six o'clock'. Forking and raking, raking and forking, we got seven loads safely hauled up the stony hill to the barn before dusk began to fall. The boys with hand-rakes went behind us who did the forking, and Eileen, who had taken Molly's place on the Jinny rake, went behind them. That dry, precious hay.

We were roping the sixth load, when Rockfall looked over with that sudden chubby smile that could soften his whole exterior, and said to me, 'Tis good of you to help; but don't stay longer than you want. We have to work all hours: we're used to it.' He stood up there against the rugged Beacon, his family standing about him round the cart. 'We're hard as iron.' His smile was like the sun for a moment. Then his mouth closed, and he pulled to tighten the rope on the load. Mrs. Rockfall had the rope wound round the shaft. She hauled on it above the shaft with her big brown arms. George hauled on the loose end, taking up the slack. 'Pull!' shouted Rockfall as he pulled and made the whole load rock. His wife pulled, and George pulled. The cart creaked, and the wheel sank an inch into the earth. 'Again!' he cried, and he pulled, and she pulled, and George pulled. The cart rocked: the wheel sank another inch. Rockfall's face was shut with effort: it was now like the grey sky that hung about his head.

There were just the three of us left in the field for the last load. The women and boys had gone on ahead to start the milking and prepare supper. Seven loads—our little loads—and still there was plenty in the field. It had been put into cocks again by the others before they left. When we reached the

barn it was quite dark. The load brushed in, filling the whole doorway; and after clattering on stones, Willie's hooves thudded on the wooden floor, and the wheels rumbled. It was a deep, thunderous sound: every movement of the tired old horse seemed bursting with power as it went echoing round the close walls. The darkness was full of living sounds, the rustling of the hay, milk ringing into pails in the shippon adjoining, calling of calves. And sweetest of all just then, the sound of frying from the open kitchen door. The yard was full of the odour of fried bacon. I went in and found a great quantity of bacon and eggs and new potatoes on the table, which was loaded with other things to follow. For nobody had forgotten that they had gone without their 'six o'clock'. Rockfall and Molly were missing. 'He'll be in in a minute: he's in stable,' Tom Paterson said. Tom's wife Jeannie did his milking when he came here, and he stayed for supper as a matter of course, though he had a fair distance to walk home.

Eileen ran to the door, frying-pan in hand, and called, 'Molly—supper.'

I expected her at that to appear immediately. But no; so I went in search. I found her in a far corner of one of the great stone buildings, which was deep and low like a cave inside, fixing an old coat round the sick calf by the light of a lantern; buttoning it and tying it, ingeniously adapting the human shape of it to the form of the calf. I helped her. The young creature was pathetically quiet as we turned it this way and that, gazing at us with dark smoky eyes. Molly just stopped short of putting its forelegs through the armholes.

We heard John Rockfall come out of the stable and fumble about. 'If you're looking for your old coat, calf's wearing it,' Molly called.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The next day dawned as clear as the previous one. Having been proved wrong yesterday, Rockfall went straight ahead turning out the haycocks. Just when it all lay flat, and we were getting the first load, a storm came over from the Beacon so suddenly that the sun went in, and the rain pelted down even before we could reach our coats. The hay was all soaked (we were not even able to finish the load) and so were we.

After dinner Mrs. Rockfall came down to Beck Mill. She had come to make the garden, she said. She proposed to Nora a little lawn edged with flowerbeds, in the stony enclosure where had been the 'pig-hole'. Nora, to whom all the slithery stones meant grazed knees and hands and foreheads, agreed emphatically, but without much hope.

Mrs. Rockfall went into the building which was barn, granary, and shippon in one, whence she collected a wheelbarrow, a pointed shovel, and a fork that had lost one of its tines. The wheelbarrow came from the shippon; a real Westmorland wheelbarrow, as proportionately bigger than other wheelbarrows as the Westmorland cart is smaller. It had none of those finer touches of the cart; but was a forthright lumpish thing. It was used exclusively for journeys between shippon and midden, loaded with manure, as even a stranger could have seen, for it was plastered over with a dried coating of manure which had bits of hay and straw coagulated in it, so that the thing looked like some furry beast emerged from its wallow.

Suffolk, on the other hand, being a country of gardens (even farms have gardens) has a nice regard for wheelbarrows: it puts them to proper uses. Mine was made by the local wheelwright, and he made it as he would make a tumbrel, with all the details of chamfered edges and lining-out. Its wheel

is a miniature cart-wheel; there is a back-board which lifts out exactly as does the back-board of a Suffolk tumbril. It is, in fact, a tumbril in miniature, only by reason of these touches of the wheelwright's art it has a grace which the sheer bulk of the larger vehicle lacks. Painted carefully in two colours, it is for robust yeoman use about orchard and garden, but not to be made a drab, shaggy manure-drudge of.

From the barn came the shovel. This part of the building was above the shippin, and its double doors faced straight into the hill-side with hardly space to manœuvre even a Westmorland cart in and out. There was a granary also to which stone steps led up from the end of the building. Underneath this was that dim low chamber in which Mrs. Rockfall had deposited the commode and boarded it round. Small leaded windows were dotted about in the massive stonework, which gave it its appearance of a medieval fastness, as it was—a stronghold of man in his oldest war, against the elements. In this dim under-chamber Mrs. Rockfall found the fork and several lengths of timber, for here were heaped the remains of many generations of household life in the mill. Old pieces of furniture, of wooden mill machinery, a stove removed by Mrs. Rockfall when with her own hands she had put a new one into the little side-room, to go with the new window with its view of the beck valley. In sawing up wood for Nora to burn in the living-room stove—the big open one common to the district, with its pot-crane—I often looked at that old stove taken from the side-room and thought that it probably functioned a good deal better than the new one, which was a so-called slow-combustion grate, which meant in practice that it either had to burn at full blast or went out. In this Mrs. Rockfall's native sense had wavered for once: she had been influenced by something else.

What she would most like to do with her leisure, she once confessed to me, would be to sit on a seat

and watch people go past. Her leisure was just two hours on Sunday afternoons between dinner and tea. The new stove in Beck Mill and the window which gave a view, though a distant one, of the road at the end of the valley, were part of that wish. Yes, Beck Mill, her first home, was her pet: she had an ideal about it, of leisure and peace, perhaps for her old age. Then, as a hobby for her inventive mind and body, she would probably set the mill going again, and keep it going.

Nora and the children—specially the children—were an excuse for her to do something about a garden there. She had pulled down the pig-hole, but I do not think that even she would have gone so far as to make a lawn just for the pleasure of it, even a tiny one. Now she set to work. With the lengths of old pig-hole timber she outlined some flower-beds. She sawed away at them, in her red revolutionary scarf. Still, I did not see where the soil was coming from. But she took the wheelbarrow to the dunghill (it almost ran there of itself) and brought back several loads of rotted manure. In front of the mill-house door were two flower-beds no wider than window-boxes held together with boards. They grew nothing but weeds; so Mrs. Rockfall dismembered them, and gained a barrow-load of valuable earth. This she sprinkled over the manure of the flower-beds. Next she set about making the lawn; first flinging all the big stones over the wall, where they piled in a heap between the wall and the beck. Then she scratched and scratched with the three-tined fork, till a little earth appeared among the smaller stones. She found a derelict roller under the barn: it may have been meant for something else originally: it was three iron cylinders on an axle, set fast with rust. She banged and oiled, and thumped and banged at the thing till the pieces moved; and with this object and a piece of rope we managed to roll reasonably level the crumbs of earth she had stirred up from

among the stones. Next she took a seed packet out of her apron pocket and sowed the flower-beds with wallflower seeds. All that was now necessary was for them to come up and the lawn to be green. She asked, did it matter not having lawn-grass seed? I said, not a bit. The opposite meadow was like a lawn, what with moisture and close grazing. This was July: I looked at the chart of Westmorland rainfall in an atlas, and said, yes, I should think grass seed would certainly grow if sown now. We searched in the barn for hay seed, but it had all been swept up. So we climbed to Mr. Ransom's at the top of the mill lane.

As I have said, his farm was the nearest that any tradesman came to Beck Mill, except the postman: it was the outpost, the leaving-place. Here we found a young fellow of about sixteen mowing with a scythe.

'Robbie,' Mrs. Rockfall called to him, 'hast any hay seed?'

'Ay, there'll be a-plenty in t'barn mow,' he replied.

We went in and swept it up into our bag. Young Robbie continued mowing, swinging easily till he came to the end of his swathe: then he joined us in the barn. He had a resonant voice whose lilting phrases were interjected with 'Ay—Ay' in a wistful unfinished intonation. Mrs. Rockfall said something that made him smile, and his long mouth stretched up at the corners sardonically. He worked in blue cotton trousers and a khaki shirt much split. Mr. Ransom came into the barn. He was an old man, chubby, with two front teeth, opposite ones which met incisively as he gave his opinion of 't'government folk'. His wife, an old bird-like figure, yet curiously young-eyed when she smiled, was hovering at her door. She had been very ill recently. It was the first year she had not helped in the hayfield, she said. I found it hard to believe that so frail an old lady had ever forked up hay and corn, particularly in the difficult conditions

of Fellside. 'We're hard as iron'—I remembered Rockfall's words.

In front of the house, which stood squarely on the hill above the beck valley, was the remains of a garden which the two had planted in their younger days, but which they now had no strength to spare from farming to tend. Hens had taken possession: it had a trampled look: but a few plants of iris and Michaelmas daisy survived. The iris-flags were out, late yellow ones, last tokens of that zest above the labour of living which was youth's. Mrs. Ransom said to me, standing in her threshold, 'We've always paid our way'.

They had an orchard too; but the gales had blown most of the trees clean out of the ground. 'William's ordered six more this back-end,' she said, 'to put in place of the old ones.'

Mrs. Rockfall asked particularly about Mrs. Ransom's health. On the way down again I learned that it was Mrs. Rockfall who was called upon to minister to sudden cases of illness in a neighbour's house. At any hour of the night a message would come and she would turn out. Though the doctor was only six miles away, those six were equivalent to many more by the time someone had reached the village telephone, and the doctor had reached the roadless farm. Mrs. Rockfall recalled the doctor in old Mr. Switch's time, who drove a gig, with a basket of carrier pigeons in the back. 'When the old man was really bad, towards the end, the doctor came every morning, and left a pigeon. I tied a message to it to say how he seemed in the afternoon. When the doctor got home from his rounds he'd go up to his pigeon loft, and see by the message whether he needed to make a second visit or not. So you see we had our wireless even in those days.'

Several times Mrs. Rockfall had been called in the night to Mrs. Ransom. The doctor's first enquiry on being rung up by anyone in the neighbourhood of Brant Farm would be, 'Is Mrs. Rockfall there?'

He would hear her report, and then, 'All right, she's doing all that can be done ; I'll be along soon.'

I asked her, 'However have you found time to learn all these things in your busy life ?'

She disclaimed any particular knowledge of doctoring. 'I've just watched, and used my common sense,' she said. 'Tis only old-fashioned remedies I know, such as my grandmother used ; and folk would laugh at them now, I dare say.'

But evidently the doctor did not. She had intuition, and a fund of living-power in herself, on which the patient probably drew as much as on the remedy. There was a faith that she could accomplish whatever she set out to do.

We strewed the hay seed on the lawn ; set the old roller going again. So the garden was made in an afternoon.

The weather bore out my chart : the grass sprang up : the wallflowers germinated in the flower-beds.

Meanwhile, the children had learned to balance on the stones ; even little Sylvia who looked as though a wind would blow her away, and instead of walking, used to dance everywhere on her toes. She flew balancing from one rocking stone to another. They now forsook the at-last safe garden for the stones in front of the house. They preferred the stones : they had interesting shapes and sizes. Martin tried every day to lift one bigger than that he had lifted the day before. He liked filling the toy wheelbarrow for the pleasure of tipping them out with a clatter.

Untrampled, the lawn grass grew long : but then one of Mr. Ransom's sheep discovered it, and leaped over the wall and cropped it day after day, determined, as a native of Westmorland, that nothing here should be for ornament only.

Next day was market-day at Kendal—the Saturday market. There were two market-days, one on Saturday for farmers' wives' produce—eggs, butter, trussed fowls, cheese, and innumerable side-lines ; the other on Monday, which was the cattle-market.

Monday was the day of beasts ; Saturday was the day of baskets. I have mentioned these baskets before ; they are square, and their corners are hard. They dig deeply and persistently into you, back and front and sides, in the thronged market bus. The lad beside you has a lapful of dead rabbits whose heads, bloody about the noses and ears, overflow on to your lap, and jiggle, jiggle, jiggle, all the way to town.

There was bustle up at Brant Farm on a Saturday morning. The congestion at separating time in the little back-kitchen was more acute than ever, on account of steps to a cellar at the farther side where were stored all the butter and eggs and dressed fowls for market.

Molly was plucking a fowl that had escaped her the night before. Eileen in the big kitchen was counting eggs into her baskets swiftly ; Mrs. Rockfall laying pound after pound of butter into hers, exact golden bricks of butter side by side. Eileen had some little milk cheeses, too (thus she had saved a lot of milk that had turned, one thundery day), and bunches of the watercress that grew along the beck, gathered when she was feeding her hens. She had even found time to make one or two posies of moss and wild flowers. All these things were appreciated in town. Nothing was too small : no trouble too much.

Among all this preparation of baskets, young George and Jimmy were eating their breakfast. But this was nothing, Mrs. Rockfall said. When she had been running the farm alone, a widow with young children, she had taken in every week a milk-float full of produce behind a big trotting mare. Bacon, and even mutton at times—anything that would sell. 'I used to look round every Friday and think, how can I make up a load this week ? I used to take a cart to potato market too, you'll see t'farmers' carts all lining Stramongate full of potatoes and cabbages. You can soon make a difference of a hundred pounds

to your takings on a farm like this, going regularly into market.'

The loading finished, clean white cloths were laid over baskets level-full of eggs, butter, cheese, chickens. Best coats were put on. Then the three of them hooked a basket on each arm, got through the doors and down the steps sideways, and clattered off in their clogs with their shoes in their hands, down the long track to the beck, which was perpetually miry with springs. The perilous descent of the steep bank to the hand-bridge was negotiated with the hundreds of eggs on either arm, and the crossing of the narrow bridge itself. Then a halt: baskets were set down while they changed their clogs for their town shoes. Here to-day I took up with them, as I was going in too: it was a little nearer for them to come via Beck Mill to the road than to go by their own circuitous and hilly track to it. They laid their clogs in the old wheelbarrow in the mill shippin; took up the baskets again. I took up Mrs. Rockfall's, to carry them up the hill for her. These baskets allow the human frame to carry more than you would think the human frame could. They make one into a sort of pack-animal, balanced, as one climbs steep, stony tracks. To carry one basket, thus loaded, would be impossible on such a track. It would have dragged one over the steep side into the beck. Or I should have arrived at Mr. Ransom's permanently kinked sideways.

The main road was full of market traffic; and there by the milk-stand were Mrs. Ransom and Jeannie Paterson already waiting for the bus. Presently it came hurtling down the long hill from the village; for though Mr. Ransom's farm was on a hill compared to Beck Mill, the village was on a still higher one. The bus, a streak of red with steamy windows, flashed past. Nobody seemed to worry about that. 'There's often three pass full up before one stops for us,' Mrs. Rockfall said. All the baskets were laid on the milk-stand. No, for

there was not room enough; some stood on the ground at our feet. There looked to be almost a bus-load of us alone, with our produce.

Jeannie was brisk, bright, and round-faced; and laughed about the mishap to her eggs the previous week. She talked to me of her little girl Rosie, who was four—about my Anthea's age. Parents with children of the same age never lack a subject of conversation. Another bus flashed by: we had got back to our children's birth; their feeding those difficult first months.

'We had to put Anthea on baby-food,' I said. 'Oh, I had milk enough for two,' exclaimed the strapping girl with pride.

Eileen and Molly were discussing what Twisgill could mean by carting hay from under the shadow of that wood of theirs by the beck: it must be wet to the bottoms of the cocks.

Mrs. Rockfall was explaining to me what the sheet of iron which formed the top of the milk-stand really was. 'Tis a backstone,' she said. I did not quite understand at first what she was referring to; there being so much that was constructed of stone here, that I looked for something actually made of stone. But she rapped her hand on it. 'Every farm-house had one, many still have. 'Twas built into fire-place; 'twas what t'old people baked oatcake on.' And she went on to tell me how the oatmeal paste, rolled out wafer-thin, was laid upon the heated iron, and then, when it was crisp, the skilful housewife by a dexterous movement would turn the whole fragile thing over without breaking it, to bake the other side. It so chanced that the chaff of the oats was the ideal fuel with which to heat the 'backstone', making a glowing layer directly beneath, and distributing the heat evenly to the whole plate. That this was not just ancient history was affirmed by Mrs. Ransom, who interrupted to let me know that she still used her backstone, and the rack just under her kitchen ceiling

was stored with oatcakes. She was, she admitted with a smile, one of 't'old folk'. Her husband, none the less, was a progressive farmer, always interested in new ideas, not in the way of mechanization, because his hilly little farm gave no scope for that, but in methods of crop and pasture treatment. He liked to be self-sufficient, and grew a patch of oats successfully beside his roots and kale on his own high, gale-swept, arable field—always had done, war or no war. Hence perhaps the continual use of the backstone.

At last a bus stopped for us, and people hooked up their baskets and clambered aboard. It was a modern high-speed, stream-lined bus, covering the great distances between townships in the hilly north. It was surprising to be whisked up into the pace of modern life, the whole ambling country load of us. A modern bus is an entirely urban product: none of its fittings recognize such a thing as market-day: it caters for the consumer taking home a small basket of shopping to a small household, not for the producer carrying all the fatness of her fields into the town. The racks were too shallow and light to take these great baskets, the space between seats too narrow. Too much room was taken up with cushioning: these country women could provide that in their own persons. The whole interior was designed for slim people with slim gear. The conductor, I felt, was allied to his bus. Market-day to him obviously was not the joy it was to his passengers, as he stepped among baskets on the floor, was jabbed in the ribs by baskets, and even in the neck, as he strove to collect fares. Full as the bus seemed when our party had saluted every other party and at last settled themselves, yet more groups as laden as ours were waiting by other people's milk-stands. I still had hold of one of Mrs. Rockfall's butter-baskets (I saw to it that I avoided responsibility for a long-hundred of eggs in that throng), and this I wedged somehow into my lap, from which

it projected, so that all incoming baskets and sharp-skewered carcasses hit it before they could hit me. Thus packed into a solid mass, we swayed together backwards as enormous horse-power snatched us from third into second gear up a one-in-four hill, forwards as we switchbacked at fifty miles an hour down the other side, to right and left as we swung round bends, and bump, fifty noses hit fifty basket-handles as all brakes were put on for a cow. Everybody talked hard: Eileen and Molly were still wondering what Twisgills were up to with that hay, and should they return by the early afternoon bus in case father——?

As we neared Kendal, roads converged, and we could see other red buses coming down from the hills and racing along the level mile to the town. From every direction these buses were pouring in, each one duplicated and trebled to take all the people waiting at the ends of lonely valleys, whither they had tramped with their baskets. At the bus-station by the river all the buses met, and all the people, each one swelled to the width of three by the baskets, surged steadily up a narrow old street. Presently we met people similarly loaded coming from the other direction, and where the two streams converged there was an entrance which swallowed the multitude. Inside I found an enormous room with a glass roof, and rows of tables and benches along its whole length. On these seats the farmers' wives and daughters settled themselves, and set out their baskets on the tables in front of them, rolling back the snowy cloths and displaying their wares. As we were carried in on the tide, Mrs. Rockfall said to me, 'It's a free market.' And more than once I was told, 'It's a free market.' That was the great thing about it, there was no toll or fee of any kind, but anybody who had produce to sell could sit down there and sell it. An Englishman's jealously guarded right. Nor could anyone lay claim to any particular place there by virtue of having sat in it for any

number of years ; though in actual fact they had their accustomed places, where their regular customers looked to find them. Mrs. Rockfall stopped at the end of one of the lengths of table almost in the centre of the room, and deposited her baskets on it with an exclamation of relief. For years she had sat in that spot, first alone, and later with Eileen beside her.

Eileen settled herself now beside her mother and uncovered her baskets of eggs, displayed her watercress and posies. Mrs. Rockfall only half-uncovered her butter. At that time there had been no clear ruling about how the free market stood in regard to rationing : the position was that (officially, semi-officially, or unofficially nobody quite knew) farmers' wives could sell a little surplus butter freely in the market. Later this was disallowed, and the free market was closely watched for those casual customers who tempted farmers' wives to sell them butter without coupons. At present butter was sold openly without hindrance ; but the increasing demand from casual customers made it necessary for Mrs. Rockfall to keep an ample reserve hidden for her regular ones. For she had as much of a 'good-will' in that way as a shop. People of the town and people even from outside came in on Saturday to the market to get a weekly supply of her goods. It was a form of direct supply grown up by custom on the tacit understanding that Mrs. Rockfall and her goods would be there and the buyer appear on the day and the hour. It worked with such simplicity and smoothness as to escape notice what a great number of people were being fed weekly by this means with the minimum of waste ; for on the basis of Mrs. Rockfall, every farmer's wife here—and by now there was not a spare place at the tables—represented a number of customers which multiplied itself into a host of people.

Molly had nothing to sell here ; she had departed on shopping errands in the town. At first she and Eileen had been partners in the fowls, but partner-

ships in agriculture prove unsatisfactory even between sisters ; and now Molly was looking for some other side-line, hence her idea of the vegetables. Looking round here, and later the town, it occurred to me that she could do very well if she had a few frames and a little glasshouse, for anything in the nature of salad stuff was scarce and dear. This would have proved right, for I heard of people with just a small greenhouse who made a lot of money with tomatoes that year. When I suggested this to Molly she agreed, but said where around their home was there a level spot on which to stand a glass-house, that it would not be exposed to the winter gales that would smash it as easily as a hammer an egg ?

The little group who had stood at our milk-stand were widely dispersed in the market : I found Jeannie in one place, Mrs. Ransom in another. Mrs. Rockfall's neighbour on the bench came from some distance on the other side of the town, so that market was an exchange of news and gossip as well as of goods.

A great buzz of voices filled the air ; for as the farmers' wives had nothing to do but sit and await their customers, the market was both physical rest and social club. Even as the remote farmer, mounting his fell-top, was in view of the town, so here his wife was in actual touch with the inhabitants of that great view. A certain small white dot of a farmstead would stand for the face and voice and animation of a neighbour. This is true community. Without actual contact community is a sort of broadcast myth.

All the space between the tables was filled with customers, regular and irregular. They walked round, scanning the wares, stopping to ask the price of this and that. By some form of indirect communication the prices of the various goods were more or less fixed, and you could walk all round the place without finding more than a halfpenny differ-

ence in, say, the price of raspberries. The wives were completely unselfconscious sitting there in rows with the public prying, pricing, criticizing, and comparing the contents of their baskets. All sorts—town folk, country folk, even county folk; and, most motley clad, rich and poor evacuees mingled there. Even blood-red finger-nails and exotic female trousers could not flutter those ample and well-founded wives. Their settledness, with their produce of local earth, beside the shifting, drifting, urban throng, was like a parable.

Not only middle-aged and old wives, but smartly dressed young daughters. It was all too friendly to be *infra dig*. Mrs. Rockfall, to whom I found myself come round again, smiled at my interest in the scene, to her so ordinary, to me from the east, where everything is now done by auctioneer, so rare. 'I wish we had a market like this at home,' I said, 'where my wife could go and sit with eggs and cheeses; and Anthea take her place beside her as she grew up.'

'Perhaps she wouldn't like to,' she replied. There was an idea that we were all gentlemen and ladies south of the Midlands—species that did not occur up here, where all were men or women. Mrs. Rockfall went on, 'T'young ones often don't take to it at first. Eileen, when she came here with me, said, "Oh, I could never sit there with my eggs to be stared at".'

Eileen put in, 'I felt awful first time I sat here alone—as though everybody was staring at me. And when somebody said that one of t'eggs I'd given them was too small I was ready to sink through floor.' She laughed. Mrs. Rockfall added, 'Now she wouldn't miss a Saturday for anything.'

Well, who would not be proud to sit behind such goods? What struck me most about this form of trade was the freshness, the buoyancy, the bloom of it. Oatcakes, wild raspberries, eggs, snow-white milk cheeses: then the rich green of watercress. Bunches of flowers stood among dressed fowls.

Brawns were beside red-currants. What a medley; what a harmony. Hedgerow and brook and dairy—wading and plucking, and baking and churning. Upon the tables lay the essence of rugged acres and rugged homes, of a week of human energy in and about them.

Not here, as in the chain stores, did the young woman serving you hold out her hand for your money, looking another way, ting it into a register, and hand you the article, still without looking at you. But it was, 'How's Charlie?' '... Oh, have you? I've a little niece just that age. ...'

'... Yes, Daisy calved last Wednesday—no trouble at all—a beautiful heifer calf. ...'

Brother Harvey's sister was here, who kept house for him, he being a bachelor. At sight of her butter I remembered vividly the spotlessly scrubbed flags before her dairy in the fields there, far from any road, and herself at the separator, as I passed through their yard that first morning. The produce was all aglow with personal pride, housewifely zest. They were not all women, though; not quite. A few elderly men, who had neither daughters, nor any longer wives to go to market for them, were sitting here in their best black clothes with their baskets of eggs, and flowers in their buttonholes.

At the entrance to the market was posted up a government regulation regarding the selling-price of eggs, framed in this sort of language: 'Grade I: Eggs of which any six weigh not less than so much, so much a dozen', and so on through a number of grades. All scrupulously and mathematically conceived to ensure absolute fairness. After I had read it over carefully twice, my feeling was, how unreasonable of the hen to give such a lot of trouble by not laying a standard egg. What the market folk made of it I cannot imagine. One thing was obvious, that eggs were being sold with remarkable speed, and both parties seemed satisfied. I rather think that this market must have been a great

nuisance to officialdom, as not coming within the recognized channels of trade. And as more things came to be rationed, it had to be increasingly patrolled. But 'Tis a free market', and I think these people would have fought tooth and nail for it.

I noticed that trade stalls had edged themselves as nearly into the market as they could : they lined a short, broad passage that connected it with the street. The street itself was thronged with stalls, along the middle and down each side. August was not so far ahead, and shops displayed one of two notices. One announced that this shop would be closed on the Monday Bank Holiday and Tuesday following. The other in big black lettering stated that in consequence of the government having CANCELLED Bank Holiday this year, this shop would remain open. These contradictory notices faced each other across the street, neighboured each other ; and I received an impression of some disagreement among the people as to whether or not there should be a holiday. The Lakeland buses, at any rate, were packed to capacity as they passed through the town. It seemed strange to me at the time, and it is stranger still on recollection of those critical days.

The narrow hilly Stramongate was to-day the Potato Market. Besides its usual crowded business of pork, clogs, corduroys, rakes, forks, and shovels—and of course pasties—there was the added congestion of farm carts heaped with new potatoes and cabbages. Here you could buy potatoes by the pound or, if you were early enough, by the ton. There must still be good stabling in plenty in this ancient town, for all the carts were with empty shafts, and the horses must have been put up somewhere. Down Stramongate, as I stood there, came a buggy, a varnished gentlemanly affair, in which a young man was driving a fine black trotter.

Two other things Stramongate sold outstandingly well—books and ice-cream. The bookshop had a

large stock, and that hospitable air of having been founded by someone who really cared for books. I even found some of my own there ; and a story of an Essex village, which a country friend told me he was writing, on the day of its publication. It was like meeting my friend face to face. The other shop was the creation of a charming Italian family ; it was like no English shop. It was an Italian fantasia in the heart of the grey north-west ; a luxuriance of glinting and pretty confectionery, and cane-coloured wooden cubicles where you sat and ate the best ice-cream I have tasted. It made me desire a younger appetite for ice-cream. I liked to buy things for the pleasure of trying to follow the tripping and bubbling English of the proprietor's wife and daughter. The proprietor, I learned, was very popular in the district ; had been there for years, and visited and shot with the farmers. Always the door of the shop stood open. Then Italy declared war against us. I found the door shut. But the shop was not closed. The proprietor's wife and daughter were at their places behind the counter ; but suppressed and silent as with tragedy. Everyone was sorry for them, and for the man himself, the best of fellows, friendly and generous, whom we had heard had been interned. I was seeking something for my twins' birthday. They were to be three years old, and I was searching desperately in shops given over more and more to unadorned necessities, for something small and pretty that would delight a child, a sweet with a touch of fancy. And she had it. She roused when I told her of my babes and their birthday ; her eyes brightened : yes, she had something—the last few such things. She knew so well what pleased a child. She put on the counter an owl, a dog, and a little doll, of chocolate, covered with variegated tinsel paper. I would have given anything for them, but they were absurdly cheap. How I thanked my enemy.

A man there was in this strange grey town, a

herbalist to whom was accounted such wisdom and efficacy by the farming folk that they went to his shop as to a physician, not just to buy this or that, but to say they had a certain pain here and what could he give them for it? Counter conversations were in snatches of, 'How does he seem this morning?', etc. A man with eyes of faith, of vigour; who, though as yet there had been no air-raïd warning in the town, sat devotedly night after night on the roof-top, watching the sky, as warden.

I went to buy some herbal smoking mixture for one who by mixing it with strongest shag, felt he could still enjoy his pipe as uninterruptedly as before prices went up and pensions went down. Several of the farming folk entered during the short time I was there. And Tom Paterson said to me later in the field, 'Ay, he's a wise little man is yon.'

The hustle of the market, though intense, was brief. By twelve o'clock the big market chamber was almost deserted. At the bus-station and at street corners, farmers' wives stood with those big baskets empty. It was now a bustle to get home: and within an hour or two, I guessed, most of them would be forking hay to their husbands in far fields. Mrs. Rockfall was waiting for the homeward bus; her two baskets as heavy as before—with shopping. The girls stayed till the afternoon bus. It was their day out.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The mystery of what Twisgill was doing with his hay was solved when we returned. He had carted it all from under the shadow of the wood to the high open part of the meadow, and spread it out again there, the better to dry it. This made a double carting of it, but they thought nothing of labour here, if by that they could get the hay in better

condition. On the following Monday the Rockfall family set about getting their 'seeds' (*i.e.* the rank and matted crop of clover-hay). Again and again Mrs. Rockfall had exclaimed, 'I wish we'd got t'seeds home.' They lay in the farthest bottom of the farm, towards the tarn, a lonely place of sedge and waterfowl, with the four acres of fodder crops rising sharply on one side. It was a long, long pull home with the heavy clover. They had made several attempts to get that clover already, but each time, after much shaking out and turning, they had been defeated by the weather. It had had to be cocked up again, each time more matted, losing more of the valuable leaf. If we did not get it this time there would be little left but hard wiry stalk.

Somebody had borrowed a couple of rakes from brother Harvey. These were held up by Mrs. Rockfall as an object lesson to us. By no means new, they were yet in perfect condition, teeth all intact, bows firm, and with the initials H.R. branded on the handles.

'They're very particular of their tools over there.' She indicated not only Harvey's, but the farther Rockfall farmstead whence the family originated. 'Don't anybody break these, and be sure they're sent back.'

Rockfall exchanged one for his own which was awry. 'Time was,' he said, 'when every man would have his own rake, fork, and scythe, and not let any other body use them.'

I refused the other rake, and stuck to the gap-toothed one I had got. I was not going to be responsible for that precious one: I felt somehow the things had a personal value, as a witness of care, and that even a bran-new rake in place of it would not be so acceptable. Anyhow, it was late to be borrowing full-teeth rakes now we were on the clover: the difficulty was not to get the teeth to grip it, but to shake them free. It added to the labour of turning, an extra jerk to free the rake after every stroke.

I well remember that morning: the speed at which we worked; Rockfall striding ahead, snatching at the clover with such force as if he would send it rolling into the tarn. Next Tom Paterson, who had come early that day, keeping close behind Rockfall. Then me, Mrs. Rockfall, and the girls. The rake-handle felt like a bar of hot iron against my hands. But one became part of the rhythm of the others, and was hardly aware of oneself till we paused at the end of the rows, and I bound a handkerchief round my hand, and Molly felt a clegg bump on the back of her neck, and Mrs. Rockfall murmured something about her bad foot. I saw then that she was wearing a clog on one foot and a shoe on the other. I looked at the foot with the shoe on it and asked, was it on account of Jack stamping on it? She said, no, that wasn't the bad foot but the other one: she could not bear to wear a shoe on it: it was too uncomfortable.

'Lasses won't wear clogs to-day,' she said with an ironical smile as Eileen came up. 'They think they're too hoydenish.'

Just then I heard shouting in the distance and a barking of dogs. 'What's that?' I asked. But after a glance in the direction from which it came (nothing could be seen for the hill) Rockfall remarked, 'Tis only Williams rounding up their sheep, I dare say. Theirs is a wild lot.' He started straight away with the turning again and we all followed. The shouting receded, or at least came no nearer, but the barking did, and bleating. I wondered what sheep were like which were wilder than Rockfall's. I just happened to look up in that direction, where, incidentally, a couple of tame cats who had followed us sat among the carrots and green plants, when the whole wall for about ten feet seemed to bend like cardboard. I disbelieved my eyes: but next instant the wall which looked so stout came crashing inwards, and sheep poured like a flood through the gap. I thought they would never stop. With the sheep

came a couple of dogs. The thunder of the stones added to the din. The patch of carrots and greens was next to that wall : the sheep swarmed all over it. When this happened we were at the farther end of our field. 'The carrots !' Molly cried, and ran. She called Rover and Flash, and they ran too : we others followed. It was all uphill : it was more a matter of climbing than running, with the loose earth and stones slipping from under our feet. Rover, though old and lazy, would do anything for Molly. The insistence in her voice sent him bounding ahead like a young dog—that and the sight of strange sheep (and dogs) invading his people's land. Flash, too, was full of spirit, and in less than a minute they were trying to roll back the flood of sheep while yet more were pouring through the gap. Dogs, cats, and sheep were mixed in the mêlée. We waded into it, and rescued the cats before they were trampled to death. But not before an invading dog had gone for one : Rover went for the dog, and they tumbled down among the sheep locked in fight. The other dog joined in, I don't know where Flash was. The others had now come up. The crush of sheep prevented Molly and me from getting to Rover : all we could do was to get outside the flock and join with the others in holding them, then turning them back whence they had come. Gradually we got them moving through the gap again, and Rockfall, who had had the presence, or absence, of mind, to bring his rake with him, broke it—brother Harvey's rake—in driving off the dogs and rescuing poor Rover. The old dog lay for a moment ; then roused and shook himself ; saw that the offending sheep were still in our field. He was magnificent, working as I had never seen him work before. That was the dog he must have been in his youth. He kept weaving to and fro, pushing the sheep slowly back through the gap, yet never so as to block it ; never panicking them into breaking back, wild and frightened though they were. At last it was done,

the stragglers were pushed through, and Rover stood in the gap to guard it. He had done all this on three legs. He lay down there among the boulders, and licked himself. All the time that Rockfall and I were stopping the gap with wire, he lay there licking himself.

Rockfall sighed resignedly, looking at the ten-foot gap and the heap of stones. 'Eh, here's another job for a wet day.'

I was surprised to see how easily, once it is started, the impregnable-looking dry-stone wall will collapse. As for the carrots and greens, they were no more.

After another short spell of turning the clover, it was dinner-time. Molly called Rover, but he was gone. She called him again when we reached the farmstead, but he did not come, and we could not find him. Towards the end of the meal somebody looked out and informed us that Rover had returned and was asleep on the flags outside the door. He must have made his own slow painful progress home over the fields. Molly took a bone from the pot, with plenty of meat on it. As we went out she called Rover and offered it to him. We waited with a smile to see him awake to the unexpected morsel as its scent percolated through his dreams. But he did not move: he lay stretched there dead.

We walked sadly out to the clover field, carrying Rover with us. Rockfall went to a certain spot in the field. He said to me, 'I shouldn't need to work if I had all the money that's buried where I stand.' This spot, I learned, was the graveyard of the farm; low-lying and spongy, the only place where a hole of any depth could be dug, on account of the underlying rock everywhere else. The last burial there had been hardly a year ago—'Mettle', they exclaimed as this occasion brought that to mind. 'We shall never have another horse like her.'

So poor Rover was interred beside Mettle, and lay with all the past generations of Brant Farm. Then we set about carting the clover.

The importance of the clover was marked by the fact that Rockfall at last decided to fetch the hay-turner out. It was useful for what they call 'putting in'; putting the clover-hay into long double rows ready for forking into the cart. Molly volunteered for the job of driving Willie in the machine, while the rest of us finished shaking out some cocks under the hedge. But soon she climbed down from the seat and led him. 'T'wheels hit his heels going downhill, and then he begins to run away,' she cried. 'Wey—wey back, Willie.' The horse flinched and jumped; was brought to a standstill.

'Eh, but you took job on, you must manage as best you can,' her mother panted from the clover cocks. Rockfall and Tom Paterson were in a far corner of the field. I said, 'Shall I drive him?'

Molly gladly passed the reins over to me. I mounted the seat, and off we started. There was the double business of attending to the horse and the turner: the unevenness of the ground made it necessary to keep altering the height of the tines. There was a lever for this. The journey was like a switchback: I was glad of the lever. I tried to look as though I was using it to alter the height of the tines as I passed Rockfall and Tom, and not to keep from being flung off the seat into the machinery.

We turned at the end of the field. Here the ground went abruptly downhill and ended in a triangle of boggy land by the tarn (more 'piking'); so I had to turn athwart the slope at a steep angle. Immediately I did so, the machine slid out of gear owing to a worn spindle. I shouted to Willie twice without effect, before remembering that they did not say 'Woa' here but 'Wey'. At 'Wey' he halted—or because of the accumulation of hay under the machine.

I managed to get the machine back into gear, and restarted. Now I turned again, this time straight up the slope. I had to lean far forward

not to be thrown off backwards. Willie, feeling the sudden weight of the machine at this uphill turn, broke into a gallop—or rather into a series of leaps. My feet slipped off the rests, and nothing held me in the seat but the lever. I could not even look as though I were using it for its real purpose. Machine, horse, and I seemed transformed into a sort of giant grasshopper. I had tried most jobs in farming by now, but not going full gallop on a hay-turner. The gear jammed again with all this jerking, and that brought Willie to a halt.

The rest of the journey was peaceful by contrast, till once more I came to that hilly end of the field. Then, first the machine ran on to his heels: we could not tighten the breechens any more: then it was thrown out of gear; and then came the gallop. I understood why Rockfall preferred to work with his hands.

After tea, George and Jimmy came into the field from school. We had begun carting, and George took a fork and tried to fork up the heavy clover to his father in the cart.

'Oh, George, no!' his father cried pleadingly, as we stood back out of the range of George's dangerously swaying fork. There had already been enough interruptions to this attempt to get the clover.

'You'll only go and give your father a stab,' his mother said. 'Lead the horse if you want to help, or rake behind.'

But no, he did not want to do either of these things, but to fork like a man.

'Someone usually gets a stab before harvest's done,' Mrs. Rockfall added.

One had to turn the fork in lifting the hay, and withdraw it sharply as the loader spread out his arms to embrace it. Unless one turned the fork, it caught in the hay and could not be drawn out. Once Rockfall drew in his breath sharply, and Tom whose forkful he was receiving looked anxious. 'Did I——?' But no, it was a thorn. I hoped I

should not be the one to administer the inevitable stab.

No sooner had George been persuaded to desist than young Jimmy seized the rake out of Eileen's hand and began raking at the hay in a way that more resembled beating something to death, grunting and puffing, and red in the face. 'Oh, don't, Jimmy; stop it—that'll do.' Eileen struggled to regain the rake.

'Now Jimmy,' his mother coaxed, 'don't go trying to do it: you know you can't, you'll be tired in five minutes. One day you shall.'

'He'll not want to then, maybe,' his father said.

The rake was retrieved after a struggle in which he was fighting off his sister and trying to work with it at the same time, using one end as a weapon and the other as a rake. He jumped about full of pent-up energy. He buffeted Flash, grappled George. The two boys rolled over and over in the hay. Though much smaller than George, Jimmy was possessed of a fiery energy, which at first was more than a match for his brother. George's blood was slower; his eyes were thoughtful and considerate, enquiring rather than assertive. Finding himself whirled to the ground, he grappled his brother in self-defence, concentrating on holding him still. Their father stood and laughed, his exasperation at delay overborne by the sport of the contest. Wrestling being a traditional pastime of the hills, he encouraged the younger boy. 'Go on, Jimmy: now get thy leg behind his knees.'

Eileen felt fine weather wasting. 'Oh, do give over, you two. Look, they're spoiling t'cocks we've not broken out.'

But George had Jimmy in his grip now, and held him helpless.

'Now that's enough,' Mrs. Rockfall cried, seeing Jimmy's furious red face being pressed into the hay.

'Nay, let them have it out,' her husband laughed.

Jimmy suddenly made a quick effort, after lying

still. Once again George was taken unawares : Jimmy slipped free, leaped up, and returned to the attack. Now the wrestling became silent and grim, with only deep breathing and strangled exclamations.

Suddenly John Rockfall shouted, 'That's enough : have done now.' He looked stern.

George broke away and went to lead the horse : Jimmy flung himself down among the uncut grass on the bank. Work went on.

Towards six Rockfall took George to help him milk the cows, leaving Mrs. Rockfall, Tom, and me to continue with the carting. The shallow cart with its boat-like curves looked such a dainty thing in which to carry all this clover home. We still did not seem to have made much impression on it. The empty cart came back to us with our 'six o'clock'—buns and new milk. Mrs. Rockfall poured it out, brimming the cup in an instant. She did not wait for the cup to be emptied, but poured hers into the lid of the can and tipped it to her lips. Milk dribbled through the rivet holes. 'It's running, Mother,' cried Eileen. She replied, 'Twon't run much : I'm too thirsty.'

Finally Mrs. Rockfall and I were left alone in the field, re-cocking a row or two we had not been able to carry that day. The thing that differentiates Westmorland farming most from that of Suffolk seems to me to be that in Suffolk the normal expectation is that to-morrow will be fine, and in Westmorland that it will be wet. They make their haycocks in a (to me) peculiar manner. They do it with a rake instead of with a fork ; chopping lengths off the rows and rolling each up into a sort of bundle. Long lengths, and then shorter lengths rolled up and laid on top of the larger heaps, giving a sort of cottage-loaf effect. Except that the top lump was more likely to uncurl itself like a swiss roll and flop on to the ground. Jimmy's pleasure was to go round giving every cock a good prod and crying, 'That's a cockly one.' Cockly they were, do what

you would to pat and coax those swaying heaps together. The rake seemed such an awkward tool for the job. They used it as a kind of claw when they wanted to lift one bundle on to another, putting the left arm also round the hay. And they seemed to use their legs as much as their rakes to roll up the lengths they chopped off. With all this, their cocks were quite small, and after a few days of rain became depressed black pimples.

Whereas in Suffolk, a man takes a fork and builds a haycock at least as high as his shoulders, putting the hay on lightly in layers. Then he has made something that will stand against the rain. I never have understood why they make such funny little haycocks in so wet a district.

'Ah, Mettle,' Mrs. Rockfall said as we worked in the field together. 'We shall never have another horse like her. She was with us last harvest. How we miss her. She used to carry the children on her back almost before they could walk. She was quiet and strong, and always willing; and she bred some beautiful foals. Look!' She pointed to a field of Harvey's. 'There's one of Mettle's. Harvey thinks she's in foal. T'others were all horse-foals: so Bonny is our last chance of keeping t'breed.'

Shading my eyes against the low sun, I saw the mare Bonny, on which so many hopes were fixed, feeding in the field. Nor had Mettle been the first of her line: she had been bred of a yet earlier Mettle. There was something distinctive about the breed. 'I could tell one of Mettle's anywhere,' Rockfall had said to me. It was a family breed of horses that had served these family farms. There they had grown old and died: they were never sold to the knacker. Generations of them were under the ground on which we stood. It was a lonely spot, a convergence of the small valleys in which the family farms stood, more or less equidistant from them all.

The sun was pale through cloudy mist, and stood upon the Beacon. Wild duck were circling the tarn.

Mrs. Rockfall talked as we worked. The rush of the day was over, and we worked easily; and often she would stop, leaning on her rake, and gaze at the sun going down. We were standing by an oak-tree, when she said, 'Twas here Simon got the knock he died of. He was cutting grass. 'T didn't seem much at time. He lay in hospital a year before he died. I knew, the last month, that he was going. When you've seen as much sickness as I have, you can tell when a body's going to die—something in the look of them. He kept asking about t'farm, and talking about what he'd do when he got home again. Right to end we talked about what was to do next week on farm. He never knew he was dying—not right to last. He loved t'farm: he thought about it more than himself; and that kept him from knowing.'

Strange it was to her, this field at dusk, with wildfowl rustling and calling from the tarn; so full of death, yet thronged with the living each year; with the grass growing vigorously, this spot of winter stillness in her heart. But no, even this tragedy was warmed with the health of her being, not left outside her present activities.

I said, 'Now I've seen something of the work on a farm like this, I wonder how you managed alone.'

'With twin babes, too,' she laughed. ''Twas a struggle. But I was brought up to work. My mother died when I was born. I was taken to my grandmother's in a butter-basket. She brought me up.

'Life was just work and bed in those days. Lasses don't know anything about work to-day. When old Mr. Switch was alive we used to rouse at half-past four, summer and winter.'

'Whatever could they do at half-past four on a farm in winter?' I asked.

'He and Simon used to go flailing in t'barn till 'twas light enough to start work out of doors,' she said. 'Eh, but we had to find ways for a bit of

laughter too sometimes,' she added. Her warm smile broke out again.

'I dressed up as a gipsy once when I was a girl, and met my grandmother at Whitsun hiring fair, and told her her fortune. She went home in such a fluster. "What do you think?" she cried to grandfather, "a gipsy woman took hold of my hand at t'fair and told me everything about myself as true as if she was my own daughter." I could hardly keep from bursting out laughing as I sat there.'

I wish I could remember all that Mrs. Rockfall told me of her past life as we worked together on occasions such as this. Of the farm on the banks of the Lune in which her childhood had been spent; where work was exigent, yet where there were adventures and laughter too. Only her own unquenchable spirit made the fun, and her grandparents should have known themselves lucky for her presence. Her grandfather did, apparently: because the only reason for which she was allowed out was that of an errand; and he saw to it that he often needed a fresh supply of tobacco from the village. There had been eerie midnight vigils, sitting on guard for beck-watchers (water variety of the gamekeeper), while others waded up the river with a dark lantern for salmon. What a fuss there was if she mistook the rustling of an animal and gave the alarm needlessly. The farm cellar of her childhood was strewn with fine salmon after a successful night, and there were methods of quiet disposal to the trade round about. These native dwellers by the becks felt they had as much right to the produce of the water as of the land, an attitude which was resented by the anglers of the district, to whom the catching of trout or salmon was a complicated sport. I must say, having seen the unbelievable ease with which a trout allows itself to be caught by a boy with bare hands, I have sympathized with the anglers in their essentially British habit of making rules of fair play between themselves

and fish. At the same time, after having watched fat trout, and latterly, two shining salmon, basking for days just below the kitchen window, one would have had few scruples, had one known the trick, in acquiring a meal by stretching out one's hand. The anglers, too, discount the element of sport which the combined darkness and illegality gives the poachers. By day it is an exercise in self-control, at least in the case of salmon. One lad whom I met remained stone-still for two hours over a salmon before he dared strike. The reward of his patience was, I can tell you, delicious.

CHAPTER NINE

We were roping the last load near the Brant Farm graveyard, when I noticed that Willie was getting fidgety. 'He won't stand here long,' Rockfall said; 'tis soft ground. Look, t'wheel on your side's gone in already: mind how you pull on t'rope. Step him on a bit: I've been over with a cart here.'

I noticed that in roping the load—twisting the rope round the shaft and pulling on it—they always did it on that side of the cart first whose wheel stood on the higher ground. And in leading home the load that night, Rockfall did not go just straight for the meadow gate, but deviously to avoid certain soft places he knew of. Willie knew them too.

'As for yon piking in t'corner,' he said, indicating the piece by the tarn; 'neither Willie nor any other horse will stand there five minutes. I took him on it once, and he sweated with fear.'

A 'throw-over' was the accident most to be guarded against on these farms. Only a few days previously a boy of twelve had been fatally injured. He was riding the horse for his father, who was on the mowing machine. The wheels slithered over a dyke with some loose earth, dragging the horse

down upon the boy. 'I'm all right, father,' the boy had said, and within a minute he was dead. He was the only boy of the family: the other two children were daughters. This added to the tragedy in the eyes of those who looked that way at tea-time from the fields of their hereditary farms.

It was not until we were carting the hilly home meadow that I really saw how the cart had to be manœuvred to bring it home. Hardly anybody dared turn a loaded cart on that field, except Rockfall, for fear of a 'throw-over'. The cart was loaded moving athwart the slope; then started for home. Both horse and driver knew the critical moment, when the sharp turn was made to face the hill. Willie put forth all his power as the dead-weight of the cart came on his collar.

The first time I saw the home meadow it was a mass of wild flowers of all colours—many of which I had never seen in Suffolk. It was beautiful, but was it farming? After we had talked for a while on agriculture, Mrs. Rockfall apologized for the flowers, saying that as the way to the buildings lay through that meadow, it was awkward to graze, and was too often cut for hay. It was mown in three 'settings', so that while one was being carted, the other two were making. It was hot out there—hot for Fellside, that is—and there was no shade. For myself, I enjoy working in the sun so long as my head is covered. My big rush hat, which I bought for a shilling, was just the thing as long as there was no wind; but a breeze would carry it off like a kite. I enjoyed carting the hay in the home meadow: the farmstead looked close and friendly. We were in sight of the railway, and saw the great stream-lined locomotive pass with its train to Scotland. All that that meant to us was, 'half-past three—soon be tea-time—has anybody gone to get it?'

This was one of the busiest days: Rockfall had started mowing at four o'clock in the morning, while the others milked. At eight a cow had to be

driven to the road, to be taken to market. It sounds simple to drive a cow from the farmstead to the road, until you begin to consider what it means to the cow. It is as though men came with sticks to drive a person out of the village in which he has spent all his life, from among friends and family who are his world, into a beyond of which he knows nothing. Would that man go? Wouldn't he, on finding himself swifter than the other two, double back by every practicable and impracticable path to his native home?

So the cow, suspecting nothing at first, went a couple of hundred yards docilely. Then suddenly realizing that the other cows were being left behind, she ran round in great sweeps and back to the yard gate, having the whole of the home meadow in which to do it. We tried her by another path: down over the beck and up the mill lane with its almost sheer fall on the right and sheer rise on the left. Half-way up she saw the trap. She took one look at the possibilities of escape, and leaped down the precipice. Only Eileen, returning from feeding her hens at that moment, prevented her recrossing the beck. But for the providential appearance of Mr. Ransom's cows (the mill lane ascended through his land), we should never have got her to the road. The sight of them interested her. Escorted by them we arrived at the turnpike. The trouble then was that they all tried to get into the lorry with her. They were driven back: she turned to rejoin them—just too late: the door of the lorry was swung up and fixed: she could only stare at them and her receding home through the bars.

In the absence of the master at market, we felt responsible for the hay. We took less time even than usual over dinner: Tom Paterson arrived before we had finished, and had Willie in the cart by the time we were out. The weather was clear overhead, but a cloudy threatening seemed to come and go about the Beacon. We were anxious to get on with the

carting right away. At dinner, looking at the big view through the window, they had kept telling each other between mouthfuls of beef and potatoes, 'Look! Twisgills are leading theirs: See! there's Maxley, too, going out to field.'

Unfortunately much of the home meadow was not yet put into rows ready for carting. 'Look, now,' Tom said to Mrs. Rockfall, 'shall I catch Jack and try to get him to go in turner, while you others get on with loading t'cart?'

We stared, expecting to hear Rockfall's decided negative, then realized he was six miles away. I believe this mild-looking young man had been secretly awaiting some such opportunity to bring Jack to order. We looked at Mrs. Rockfall. 'Nay, but——' she began; then a smile overspread her face. 'Well—think you—could you make him do it?' 'Can but try,' Tom said, and off he went, with that curiously studious look his glasses gave him, to catch the wild horse.

We went ahead with our loading. I forked up to Mrs. Rockfall; Molly raked. Eileen was left at home to deal with the dinner things.

'I never ought to let him try that great wild thing in hay-turner,' she said. We had nearly finished a load. 'Look now—look there!'

Jack was actually between the shafts of the machine: Tom was mounting the seat. The next thing I saw was the whole outfit careering across the ten-acre field, hay flying in all directions. The first click of the gear had been enough for Jack. Tom managed to put it out of gear—or it slid out—as they flew along, round and down towards the beck. What next? Would they dash into the water? I thought of his wife and child in their snug little valley farm, walking hand-in-hand perhaps now to feed the hens or fetch water; of Rockfall leaning unsuspecting over the cattle ring. How silly of us (I felt just as responsible) to bring disaster on the day by our over-eagerness.

But Tom had turned Jack from the beck: the machine swung on to one wheel; Tom was lifted from the seat, and by a miracle returned to it. I hung on to Willie who had his head up and was staring wildly: he gave a jerk which made Mrs. Rockfall sit down suddenly on the load. Jack was pounding straight uphill now. He slackened; came down to a trot. Tom switched the machine into gear. Jack tried to gallop away from it again. Tom steered him into the steepest part of the field: he could not keep up the pace, being short-winded from a grass diet: eventually he fell into a walk. By the time the top of the field was reached he was getting used to it, and turned and went round again quite quietly.

At half-past three Rockfall returned, clad in his market suit, leggings, starched collar, and felt hat, riding Eileen's bicycle. He crossed the bridge and stopped, staring. We were getting our third load: Jack was walking quietly round in the machine, just finishing the work.

'Didn't you have a trouble with him?' he asked.

'Not for long,' we said. He stared from one to another of us, but said no more.

'What about your dinner? How much did cow fetch?' they were asking, while he, 'Where are you putting that hay to?'

'On top of t'seeds in barn,' his wife replied. That seemed to satisfy him. He recollected the question about food. 'Nay, nay, I'll not take any harm.' He was peeling off his jacket.

Just then Eileen appeared at the yard gate and Mrs. Rockfall called to her to bring her father something to eat. Rockfall took off coat and waistcoat, collar and tie, and hung them about the now idle hay-turner. He hooked his hat, a hard hot trilby, on to the lever, and rolled up his sleeves. Out of the market clothing emerged his sun-burnt flesh, neck and arms, and shock of black hair. He grasped a big fork. But then Eileen came with a

dish and a spoon. It was half-full of the pudding we had so hurriedly abandoned at Tom's arrival. Then I saw what I never saw before or again—Rockfall sitting on the ground while the rest of us worked. We went on with our loading, while he reclined on the hay spooning up the pudding. We finished our load just before he finished the pudding, and Tom turned the cart uphill on the way to the barn. Rockfall jumped up, grabbed the big rake, and strode to and fro with it in a kind of physical exaltation to be out of the market clothes.

The cart was soon coming down again, empty. He stood for a minute.

'How much did cow fetch?' Molly asked again.

'Not as much as she ought—thirty pounds. She didna' show herself off well. One made forty-seven—a good bagged 'un.'

He leaned on the fork he had picked up, waiting for the cart.

'I don't like markets,' he said to me. 'Seem to upset you all day. You don't get proper meals; you miss your drinking; and there's no air in town.'

The complaint of missing his drinking might give a false impression. He was referring really to the snack (what most would consider a meal) about ten o'clock. Meals during harvest were at about two-hour intervals. Breakfast, then this that they called 'drinking' at ten. It consisted of a pint of tea and buns, pasties, or whatever was going. One found these platefuls being carried about the farm with the query, 'Where's father?' 'Where's Tom?' Then dinner at twelve, tea at three-thirty or four, then the 'six o'clock'; and supper at the last.

So of course he missed his drinking when he went to market.

Molly complained of a headache and said she ought to have worn a hat. When she came back she had found a hat. I was going to say *the* hat: there seemed to be just this one, a loosely woven straw, for the fields. Sometimes Mrs. Rockfall wore it, some-

times Molly or Eileen. But not often Eileen, she was more self-sufficient. She lost her purse one day, and could not think where she had put it. 'Somewhere to be safe, I guess,' Molly cried. 'I know—under your mattress.' Eileen turned away as we all laughed. 'Have you looked there?' Molly insisted. Eileen admitted no, she had not. Molly ran upstairs and came back in a minute with the purse. 'There, that's where 'twas.'

When Molly went back for the hat she fetched the tea too : the tea was in a pail to-day. Nora and the children came up from Beck Mill into the hay-field. Anthea had just distinguished herself by writing her first letter, one of thanks to a friend in Suffolk for a present of apples. Nora showed it to me, carefully printed, every letter in alternate colours. It read : 'Dear Mrs. Locke, Thank you for the apples. The babies enjoy the days. Martin is sometimes good and sometimes naughty. With love from Anthea.' I pointed out to her that though it was a beautiful letter, all the s's were the wrong way round. 'I think she'll know what they are, that way,' Anthea interrupted a song to reply.

'Do you like singing?' Eileen asked, who was very fond of the children. They would follow her into dim recesses of chicken houses. Six little feet can bring an astonishing number of hen droppings into a house, especially when the hens parade daily around the doorstep ; and every morning at Beck Mill there was a row of shoes to be scraped, not to mention the floor, and the big black kettle to have its beard of hanging soot scraped off.

'Yes—I like singing,' said Anthea.

'What is that song you are singing ?'

'My own song.'

'What is it about ?'

'I don't remember. When I've sung one song I forget it, and begin singing another.'

Jimmy came leading Martin : he had been showing Anthea how to cross the beck, he said. Mrs. Rockfall

asked him, 'Have you been down there in that state?' He had both big toes poking out of his canvas shoes, and waggled them about to the children's delight. Their mouths were smeared red with the wild raspberries he had picked and put in his pocket and kept giving them. Again his trousers-seat had suffered (he had got hung up on a bough, Nora said), and Mrs. Rockfall tried to pull him together. 'Now you'll have to go into your Sunday best and you'll have t'seat out of them within a week. When I go to market next I'll get you a pair of fustians.' He complained of a thistle fallen down his neck. 'Why,' cried his mother pulling his shirt aside to reach for it, 'you've not put that clean vest on yet, I told you about it three days back.' Jimmy had forgotten the vest when he asked his mother to investigate for the thistle.

After tea Rockfall cried 'Come on, Martin—come and have a ride.' Martin retreated behind Nora's skirt at the loud and boisterous voice. But he was fascinated by the horse and cart, and allowed me to lift him in along with the other two. They had a joyful ride down the meadow and back. The trouble was to get them out again. I lifted out the others, but before I could get to Martin, Rockfall came round from the horse to help. The sudden appearance of that sun-like face over the side of the cart a few inches from his own, was too much for Martin, who broke into a bellow. I got him out, and to maternal consolation. Poor Rockfall stood abashed. 'I'm afraid I upset him,' he said. 'Oh no; it was just that he didn't want the ride to end,' I assured him. But the poor man was quite unhappy for a time. 'I didn't want to upset him,' he said again, as we were loading the cart. Martin was a favourite of his, and he always hailed him as though he were a farmer's boy. 'What, Martin—you going to lead the gee-gee for us this morning?' 'Hallo, Martin—you going to much out t'shippon with your wheelbarrow?'

These salutations were usually shouted from a distance, and Martin said nothing, but eyed the striding phenomenon, sack over shoulder, dog at side, thoughtfully.

It seemed hotter than ever after tea. Too hot for the Rockfalls who complained of limpness and lack of breath. Rockfall leaned over the load and said, 'Don't you ever sweat, Mr. Bell?'

We were carting now from the bottom of the field where the beck ran, and it was refreshing to kneel on the stones and bathe one's face and arms in the water between loads. The beck rushed from a tunnel of foliage here, cool with the shadow and bordered by delicate blue flowers with quivering petals.

I had had a tooth out that morning, going in on the bus after getting the cow to the road. An awkward wisdom tooth up-ended in my jaw; but it proved such a swift and painless proceeding that I was able to catch the next bus back to the hayfield. Every now and then I retired to one side to spit a little blood as unobtrusively as possible. Until Molly, who had taken on the rake, remarked as she passed, 'Still spitting blood, Mr. Bell?'

I had gained some kudos by actually going and having a tooth out that was not yet giving me raging toothache. 'Ooh, I'd never dare go and have a tooth out if it wasn't driving me mad with pain,' the girls cried. Molly had a false one in front: she took it out and showed it me. Sometimes she wore her front tooth, sometimes she mislaid it and for days went without it, till there was a village dance: then she had a good hunt for it.

Eileen felt round her mouth with her tongue, and guessed she had several that would start aching before long.

'Why don't you go to the dentist and have them stopped before they do?' I suggested.

They doubted the use of stoppings. 'How long will they last?' And then, 'How much does it cost?' They weighed up the cost against the prob-

able prolongation of the tooth's life. I urged them at least to get the dentist to have a look and advise them.

'Have you had any stopped ?'

Had I not ? I opened my mouth and showed them. Molly said she would go if Eileen would. They would both make an appointment. But Mrs. Rockfall, I could see, was sceptical. 'Though,' she admitted, 'a set of pot 'uns aren't like your own.'

Strangely enough, one of the many jobs Mrs. Rockfall had undertaken, between the death of her grandparents and her marriage, was that of assistant to a dentist. When business was slack he had occupied the time in pulling out her teeth for her, one by one, till they were all gone. I supposed he had not had much use for stoppings either ! I was further surprised by her saying, 'He promised when he retired, he'd give me his chair—it was the most comfortable chair I've ever sat in : 'twould have gone nicely in corner of kitchen, by t'fire.' The vision of a dentist's chair in Mrs. Rockfall's kitchen flashed fantastically through my mind, until I realized that he must have been so old-fashioned a dentist that the chair was just a deep, stuffed and leather-covered easy chair.

Unfortunately the dentist died before he retired, and as he had left no instructions about the chair, Mrs. Rockfall never got it. Nevertheless it had made a deep impression of physical comfort on her, though she had spent so many painful moments in it : for of course she never had gas. 'I can see it now,' she said. What a thing to have in one's mental view, with its associations of apprehension and pain. No, despite the hardy life they led, there were very few sound teeth in Fellside. I put it down to the preponderance of pastry and tea in their diet, as a substitute for the former oatcake and ale. At every meal or snack there was pastry in some form or other : the shops of the town were full of pastry—porkshops and pastryshops. The family would consume a pound of jam at tea : Mrs. Rockfall used

to buy her sugar (before rationing) by the hundred-weight. Admittedly the grocer only called once a month, and there was a winter period when they expected to be snowed up and thrown entirely on their own resources.

I was surprised to see how green they carted their hay: particularly that in the home meadow. We had carried the whole of the first setting, and had turned the second, when Mrs. Rockfall began loading some of that, though it had only been cut the previous morning. Eileen protested vigorously, lifting up thick bunches of it that were still grass. Her father said, 'Ay, but look at yon sky,' If it started to rain again, when would it stop? I think it is that in our dryer Suffolk the grass runs to stalk more quickly, and of course the stalk holds the sap much longer: the lush Westmorland grass is mostly leaf, from which the sap is quickly dried although it looks very green. I know that I caused a small late stack at home to heat, when, just from Westmorland, I carried it quickly as they did, though mine was in the open and theirs all put into a barn.

Milking is a great interruption to their harvest: it takes a slice out of the evening. We had finished our 'six o'clock' and were wanting to 'get on, when Rockfall bustled in and out again worriedly. 'I've another cow to milk and a calf newly dropped.'

CHAPTER TEN

The striding over those cobbles, sparks from the steel-rimmed clogs; and Mrs. Rockfall running out with a broom, if the cows loitered, to bustle them on before they made a mess in her yard. Then she called to her husband, 'Why don't you break out those cocks in field, there's a nice bit of breeze, and t'would dry them for to-morrow?'

'Nay'; he leaned on his fork, 'it's too late;

want a fine morning to break them out, and lead same day.'

They stared at each other across the yard in a sort of hiatus. She turned back; when he was away she became mistress of the farm again, took chances with the weather; but when he was here she deferred to him in its ordering: he was master.

'You surely aren't going leading any more of that green into barn mow,' Eileen cried. 'Tisn't fit.'

'Eh, but what makes you so fearful of it?' her mother asked. 'You're usually t'one who wants to be getting after it.'

Eileen looked confused. Her mother suspected (as mothers are so quick to do) some ulterior motive. And then I saw, emerging from Mr. Ransom's on the opposite height, a smartly-dressed dark figure, whom, as he came nearer, I recognized as Robbie. Mrs. Rockfall spotted him at the same moment. 'Oho,' she cried, with the beaming irony of her gaze full on Eileen, 'so 'tis a village frolic you were planning to go to with Robbie. And how's he getting off in t'harvest I'd like to know?'

'Mr. Ransom's led all his hay these several days back . . .' Eileen began. 'I'd not have said I'd go, only I never thought father'd be so slow with hay. . . .' The girl was torn between the duty of the hayfield and her appointment, it being unthinkable among them for one to leave the rest when work was pressing. Despite innumerable small disputes such as a large and forthright family must have, there was always this harmony of the farm-work, something outside and beyond themselves which held them together. They were not only a number of people sharing a roof and a table, but also work-mates, a skilled company.

'Ah, well, off with you and change your frock,' Mrs. Rockfall said, and Eileen ran indoors. Soon she came down looking as different an Eileen as the young man looked a different Robbie. In his dark blue suit, white collar, and with his hair brushed till

it shone, he looked very different from the chap with the split shirt who was scything. Yet he did not look awkward in his suit, but swung along in it as easily as he had swung with his scythe.

Eileen had a gay but unpretentious frock on, and came to her mother for her to do up a bracelet on her wrist. 'Jewellery and all,' Mrs. Rockfall exclaimed, with a smile at me, 'what are lasses coming to? I never had such at her age, nor since.'

'All right—it's only Woolworth's,' Eileen said. Her mother hid her pleasure at her daughter's attractive appearance under ironical remarks. Eileen looked refreshingly neat in the old kitchen that was always in a 'scrow'. Well, she had earned her dance; and I said I would shut up her hens for her on my way down to the mill.

'My—look at her ladyship,' cried Molly, coming in from the calves, surprised at the transformation; for Eileen had kept the prospect of going to the dance to herself, on account of the hay harvest dragging on so. All these days she must have been experiencing alternate hopes and fears. No wonder she worked hard.

Robbie and old Mr. Ransom had carried all theirs single-handed. 'He's a good lad is yon,' Mr. Ransom had said to me. 'He doesn't wait for you to tell him what wants doing; he sees it himself, and does it.' I think he was worth two men. His home was a farm right under the rampart of hills to the north: it stood where a giant's thumb might have pressed into those hills. The house looked like a little lump of chalk at the bottom of an avalanche. Before it and its few pasture fields was a swirling river in a deep rocky bed. There was a kind of cable bridge over which Robbie slung himself, bicycle and all, when he went to visit his parents on Sundays: but people who were not Robbie had to go a long way round by road, over a stone bridge, and then double back to get to it. There were only the pasture fields in front, and the fell swelling up close behind

the homestead. They could grow no corn there : they were too close to the living rock : even the War Agricultural Committee had given them no order to plough. They sold their lambs every October, being unable to keep them through the winter. Yet this farm and others in similar situation, purely sheep farms, were an essential part of the agriculture of England. They were not just outposts, appendages, but interlinked. They contributed unequalled hardihood : it flowed down from them in flocks every year, rivers of stamina that had imbibed the cold blasts and late and early snows, to mingle with the blood of the softer shires. Of such was Robbie, too. Working for, and saving, his hundred pounds a year ; sure in himself—I never met anyone who gave more an impression of going straight and quietly on to a purpose—accumulating his life about him slowly. The very money was like a growth ; till he should make the jump with all his resources, to one of those white sheep farms high up under yet higher hills.

That was his purpose, at least it had been till this year he had stood on Mr. Ransom's top field and gazed at the new corn landscape.

There is an excitement in corn, a power to stir people more deeply than can cattle or sheep or pigs. Suffolk, even in times of depression, was always at a tension of suppressed enthusiasm towards harvest. That the wheat was worth next to nothing in the market made no difference, or only a superficial one. The value of corn, in the sense of its power for life, was always uppermost. One year corn would be wanted again, although year after year merchants looked bored by the samples, and bakers cried down English wheat. And suddenly, like a thunderclap, that year came. To Fellside, long unaccustomed to corn, the sight was thrilling. Everywhere now the little whitening patches of oats were a myth of old men become actual. Robbie, like Fellside, was stirred. To be able to grow corn——

Corn was increasingly the conversation of Fellside, now that the hay was safe. The hay bore the same relation to the corn that a preliminary skirmish does to a battle. There had been some obstruction to the orders to plough in the first place. There had been disbelief in the possibility of corn growing, or if it grew, of ripening here. But the summer was, for Fellside, remarkably fine, and the corn was ripening. The real testing time was ahead. Soon now.

Fellside is not exactly England: it is an island within the island. Its farms were once fortresses against the invaders from the north; are fortresses still against the winds that swoop from the fells. It is an island of cloud and stone, a landscape deeply folded, a life folded away. Here in the high top field—the very same in which a year back, as Mrs. Rockfall told me, a ‘hen’s cabin’ was blown clean over the wall—acres of oats that had come through all weathers stood up peaceful and golden in a sunny evening. It was like a miracle, such bounty out of stone.

Even Eileen and Robbie were talking corn as they set off to the dance. Eileen’s heart was in it. And after they had gone, Mrs. Rockfall said, as she and I were going down to the meadow again together for a last cart-load: ‘Eileen now, ’tis a job to get her to spend money on clothes: what I said was teasing just.’

I said I was surprised: she was so prettily dressed. ‘Ah, she’s careful of what she’s got; but she’d rather spend money on meal for her poultry. She’ll spend quite a lot on that with Uncle Billy—he’s in t’milling trade, you know—but when ’tis a hat or such in a shop window—“go on”, I tell her, “you can afford it”. But she’ll look two or three times, and then go away. That’s not like a lass to-day, is it? ’Tisn’t many mothers have to encourage their daughters to buy a new hat. Now Molly’s just t’other way: she’s free with her money: if she takes a fancy to something she’ll have it before she’s

thought about it—and then 'twill get torn, or happen on some accident most likely. Eileen, you know, makes more in her quiet way than if she had a job in town, and went in and out every day.'

At that moment a sight presented itself that was like a commentary on Mrs. Rockfall's words. Molly appeared with a broom pursuing a cow which had a coloured garment on its horns. I often wondered that this, or even worse, did not befall more things; for after that great affair of the weekly wash in the middenstead—all smoke, steam, fire, and scalding water—the linen was laid out on the grass of the home meadow to bleach. Always it lay in the same place, all along beside the kitchen-garden wall, virgin sheets inviting cows and poultry to undo all that work by one single act of nature. Yet here was the first accident I had seen, and that not of the kind I had expected. The garment was removed from the frightened cow's horns, not by Molly, but by the thorns she had laid under the top stones of her wall, against which the cow had run. There, after a tug of war between horn and thorn, it hung. Molly rescued it, looked at it, and flung it in a heap on to the old iron frame beside the gate. This was the frame of a chair-bed, and incongruous as it looked sitting out in the meadow, it represented the whole of the Rockfalls' leisure. For a brief hour or two on a fine Sunday afternoon, one or other of them would take out its cushions and recline there overlooking Twisgill's farm and many farms beyond, even to the fells. But on Sunday even Twisgill's offered no changing pattern of work, so Molly or Eileen, whichever it was, would read a magazine. I at first was surprised at the eagerness with which they would ask if it had been fetched, of whoever had been to town, until I realized what it meant to them. It was of the bright romance-and-home order. The girls read it from cover to cover, the love-stories, home hints, heart-to-heart talks, advertisements. Till the clang of a milk-pail re-awakened them to

daily life. I believe the whole dreamy hotch-potch thereupon vanished clean away from their minds, for I never found any sort of day-dreams in their views, which were practical and concerned with what was to be done forthwith. They certainly had no interest in romance in the popular sense: it is impossible where a family is co-operating for their living against the elements. And no affinities with the company-served cupboard homes of town. Eileen and Robbie talked corn as they went to a dance; quite an impossible opening for a magazine story.

There was a story in one of those magazines, I remember, about a farmer and a girl who loved 'nature'; which means usually the smaller animals and birds, not anyhow the snorting young bull which Molly wrestled with daily as she fed the calves. And this young farmer in the story said to his girl, who was helping him (in the picture) carry some wisps of hay, as twelve o'clock struck, that they 'would call it a day'. Had the girls not been mentally removed, the absurdity at least of that tale's circumstances would have struck them. I think it was just the fact of sitting down and reading that they enjoyed.

Corn really did grip their imaginations. The next day saw the last of the hay home, but the family was now discussing how they between them were going to cut, bind, and carry fifteen acres of corn. That was what it amounted to, in irregular, scattered patches. But if got safe, what a bounty it would be, for man and beast in the dead time, in the uncertain time, the winter to come.

'We must depend on ourselves as t'old folks used,' Mrs. Rockfall said.

We raced to finish the hay, Tom Paterson on one side of the cart and I on the other. In my dreams I still see Rockfall, his hot red face above me among the clouds and the sky, leaning over with his huge gesture of embrace to take my forkfuls. It was short slippery hay, teasing stuff to hurry over.

Slithering the fork along, one telescoped the row of it, yards at a time, to pack it sufficiently to pick up. The boys urged us on, mocking at whichever one was temporarily left behind. Each adopted one of us and betted with the other which would win, and alternately chided and cheered his champion. Tom and I appeared to take no notice of this childish imposed competition. Yet we did race, more and more as the last two rows grew shorter.

Eileen paused in her raking to observe how the rowan berries were already reddening. They were the beauty of that country. 'I wonder,' she reflected, 'if I took a bunch to market, whether people would like to buy them for decoration.' I thought it just a passing fancy of hers, but next Saturday I saw that she had taken a bunch in with her, and she sold them. One other person in the market I noticed had had the same idea. I don't know whether she too sold hers; but in any case the principle was sound: these bunches of flowers or berries were like little flags, or painted trader's signs, drawing the eyes to particular displays of goods.

'Some say they're poisonous,' Molly said.

'I'll show you whether they're poisonous,' cried George, and dragged a whole bunch from the bush and stuffed them in his mouth.

Attention had been drawn from the race with the hay. Jimmy and the girls stared at the munching George to see if he would drop down dead. Once Rockfall winced sharply. I was glad it was at Tom's forkful not mine. 'Did I give you a stab?' asked Tom. But no, once more it was just a thorn.

George showed no signs of dying, and ceased to be interesting. They turned back to find we had just finished the hay, and nobody knew which of us had won; nor would we, who would not admit we had been racing, tell them.

'We both finished together,' we said. 'Hurrah!' cried the boys. 'We all shout hurrah at the end of the hay.' We all shouted hurrah for the last load,

except Rockfall who felt too insecure upon its more than usual height. 'Hurrah !' Up, by custom and common consent went my shilling rush hat high into the air.

Next minute I was chasing it, as it swirled rapidly away down the beck in which it had landed.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

It was mid-September when I came again to Fellside. The Rockfall family was gathered on the top field, which was the humped back of the hill that was their farm. They were standing round the oats, waiting for the reaper. Eileen was fingering the ripe ears, running her hands up the stalks. 'How much do you think there'll be? How shall we knock t'grain out? With flail like grandfather used, or shall we get one of these new government threshers to do it.' (They were small ones specially built to go to hilly places.) 'But would it ever come to us; all up and down our rough road? Where shall we store t'grain?' Such were the questions they were asking one another. They had no technique of corn; but had to cast back in their minds to the days of their fathers, remembering fragmentarily what they did. As soon as I appeared, fresh from the corn country, I was asked for an estimate of the crop. It was by our standards a mediocre crop; it had run to straw more than corn; yet it was much more impressive than a bumper display at home—the golden ears swaying gently in this field of windy memory, all among rock and fell. I told them that they should have at all events a hundred sacks from the fifteen acres.

'A hundred sacks! Wherever shall we store it all, so as rats don't get it?' asked Eileen. She was very conscious of rats, continually devising new means to keep them from her poultry food. 'They'd keep

chiggin' at them : they'd have half of them before winter was over.'

Molly was examining some big clegg bites on her arm. 'My arm's fair panting with them,' she said.

'Wherever's he got to with reaper?' cried Mrs. Rockfall. George came to say that brother Harvey had arrived to help with Jack.

'Harvey'll get him to go,' she said : 't'great, big clumsy creature.'

Soon we heard a thumping of hooves and a clattering, and Harvey's lilting voice as he called to Jack. His tone sounded assured and level, as though he were calling a cow to milking. I don't think any of us were prepared for the tremendous leaping and rearing arrival of Jack in the gateway. He stood up there like a black fury between the walls, pouncing towards the corn. I thought he would run in among it, dragging Willie and the reaper, and ruin half of it for cutting. But somehow Harvey, without disturbing his voice, turned him into the lane cut between the corn and the wall. There Jack stood panting, and Harvey patted his head and neck, while Rockfall prepared the machine. It was an old-fashioned implement, known as a rack-machine, long discarded in other parts for the binder ; but no binder would run at the angles demanded by these slopes. The rack machine was a sort of mower, to which was attached a wooden rack to hold the corn until enough had been collected to make a sheaf, when it was released by means of foot-pressure on a pedal, and gathered up and tied by one of the family. There were two seats on the machine : one for the driver and one for the wielder of a curious sort of wooden trident which Rockfall had in his hand. Harvey drove, but did not take a seat. Rockfall sat himself in his. 'Jack—Willie ! Jack !' called Harvey. He leaned back on the reins slightly, half-sitting upon the air, his elbow-joints at right-angles. Aware and calm with a sense of superior resource, jovial, yet giving complete muscular atten-

tion to the horse: the reins were the nerves and sinews of his mastery. He was as much at home with Jack as with a playful puppy. He was enjoying himself.

Not so poor Rockfall, who was nearly flung off his seat by the sudden start. He used his primitive trident to bat the corn over upon the knives with a circular movement. He looked as though he were paddling his mower through the corn like an Indian canoe. But for the first round or two he had to work it like a steam paddle. I did not know a man's arms could revolve so fast. Jack and Willie were at a brisk trot; and Harvey trotted after. There was something hearty and old-fashioned about Harvey's trot, as about the square-set man himself; it had a springing quality despite the heavy nailed boots, as though he were engaged in some native dance. The clusters of nails shone up at instants.

Fat bundles of cut oats lay at our feet; and all of us, spaced out around the field, stooped to tie them as soon as the reaper was past. Strained to tie them; such golden faggots of sheaves they were, that our straw bonds were hardly long enough to stretch round them. Complaints went up, as Rockfall whirled past the second time, but he had no breath for reply even if he could have paused to make it. For the first few rounds Jack ruled the pace of the work. We had to tie like mad in order to get our sheaves out of the way before the machine came round again. Hard at it, bent to the ground, one would hear brother Harvey's chant of seven notes to Jack and Willie, repeated like a bird's call, growing nearer and nearer. The pounding hooves I would hear: still I strained at the bonds; and out of the corner of my eye became aware of the complex machinery of eight striving legs seen from directly in front and below. Not a position to loiter in, though; and I dragged my last yet-untied sheaf and myself out of their path. Harvey's chant had a soothing mesmeric effect on Jack, and after a while

he went docilely. That chant became the theme of those harvest days. I can hear it now : I cannot write music or I could transcribe it. More than anything it had an affinity with the yellow-hammer's song : only it had a stronger, a vibrant and redoubling sort of end—like tying a double knot in music. The whole of our work became infused with this tune : at every corner, when the horses needed steadying for the turn, it broke out ; and the small fields had many corners. It was Harvey himself, the round trot, the hob-nailed dance of him. It composed itself into the rhythm of the tying of a sheaf, which single act is made up of moments and transitions. Whatever we must grant to the rational blessing of the binder, there is no doubt that something has dropped out of life with the tying of the sheaf, a piece of the living tissue of human activity. I say this, well knowing what I am saying. With aching back, thistle-peppered finger-tips, after hours and hours of sheaf-tying, I say it is a lovely and ceremonious act, cheering the heart. And if this is imputed to me as mystical and maundering, I tell you there is no time to be either on a Westmorland harvest field.

First, then, gather the corn and sheaf it, bring the heads level. Then draw a few straws, drawing them from the outside so as not to disarrange the sheaf ; let them fall through your loose grasp until they hang by the heads, and pat the heads to a bunch. All this time you have the sheaf gripped between your legs ; slip the straw band under it. Then feel the sheaf swung on the bond, swung and compressed by it, as you cross the two ends, and with a sudden thrust of the knee against it, pressing it to the ground, strain to the utmost to narrow its bulk to leave enough of the bond to knot. Everybody, I noticed, secured the bond in a different way. Mrs. Rockfall pushed the butt stalks round and under the band diagonally, Eileen pushed the ear-end under. Rockfall, stopping to help in the tying,

twisted the ends round each other several times, then, inserting his left hand under the bond, by sheer force compressed the sheaf-waist still more and crumpled the stiff and twisted end of the bond straight under. There was a separate satisfaction in each one of these acts—in the gathering, in the falling of the straws of the bond through one's hand, in feeling the swing and then the tightness of the sheaf. The sum of all was the final lifting of the sheaf, well-bound and taut, and flinging it back out of the way of the horses without any fear of it coming to pieces with the jolt. Yes, to have a sheaf in one's arms that one has well bound is a good moment, its tightness a tribute to one's own muscle. And there was Harvey's song to it, itself a part of the earth, and years of living relationship with the horse. The better you tied the sheaf the more sore you made your fingers with that last thrust under of the ends on which all depended ; till they felt no stouter than the crackly straw-butts their pressure must crumple. I understood how the legend of Ceres had been born and dwelt with men out of this close contact with the corn. All day one was embracing it, in the smell and rustle of it, eyes close to it. And when for a moment one stretched one's back from this absorption, the great view was peopled with similar scenes : the whole of Fellside was bent to the corn.

We worked hard, and I reflected with what ease a large-scale East Anglian farmer would cut and cart fifteen acres of corn. What a task, a sort of mountaineering feat, it was here. Yet the family went about it stout-hearted. Tom was not here ; being busy cutting his own. He had three acres, which he was cutting with a scythe, and Jeannie was following him, binding it, while Rosie played by the beck. Nor should we have Harvey with us in a day or two, when his corn was ready.

The side of the field on which I was stationed was next to the Brow. Far and almost sheer below lay

Beck Mill with its buildings, like a small neat plan of a place. And in the tiny grey-bordered square of green, which was the garden, moved coloured dots which were Nora and the children. Those dots represented the whole of personal life to me, while up here one was impersonal, immersed in the labour of the corn, going about it in the ancient way that the wall-builders did. I saw an increase in the dots moving in the garden : those would be the cousins from the school, I guessed, come with Nora's sister on a visit. A white patch appearing on the green must signify tea ; and at that moment the cry went up in our field from Mrs. Rockfall. We were glad of it. We looked at our sore, grimed hands and laughed. Eileen was happy despite the hard work, because she had at last made that appointment with the dentist : it had been fixed for to-day. As the day crept closer, her apprehension had increased. Then yesterday her father had announced that he would start cutting the top field to-day. She joyfully cancelled the appointment.

Said Mrs. Rockfall at tea, 'I wondered what she was thinking of, making an appointment with a dentist in harvest.'

Harvey teased Jimmy, tickled his big toes and other portions of his person that were visible through his clothes. 'First thing you do after tea is to go and put another shirt on,' commanded Mrs. Rockfall. Would she never give up the unequal struggle over Jimmy's clothes ? I wondered. Harvey's sheep-dog puppy gambolled about among us. Westmorland farmers' dogs follow them everywhere, even where there are no sheep, as in the harvest field. Though more than once the hayfield had been invaded by straying sheep, whom Flash had been sent to chase out. Not that he had been particularly successful. After galloping up and down the hayfield a number of times, it was Flash who was exhausted, not the sheep. That would have been enough to kill a Suffolk sheep six times over. Harvey's pup found

a friend in Jimmy, to whom he devoted himself exclusively, to the relief of the party ; seeing that our tea was insecurely balanced on the sloping ground. The day was fine and warm ; one did not notice how alive the air was with minute insects till the tea was poured out, when three or four drowned themselves in one's cup immediately. Harvey, after his trotting race with Jack, was very thirsty. He could control that horse to a nicety, but not fish insects out of his tea. His great forefinger chased them round and round : at last he drank up the tea, insects and all. The jam-pot went round. They always spread it with a spoon in Fellside ; an awkward tool for the job, but they like to blob it on. A thick slice of bread and butter, a thick layer of jam, and another slice clapped on. Then the forefinger goes round the edge collecting the ooze, and is licked. Next comes a plum pasty : one approaches one's slice from below to make sure of catching the dollop of fruit that has overflowed.

To-day Mrs. Rockfall was setting forth her views on farming. 'Farming won't come right here, nor anywhere else, till we get back to our proper thing, stock-rearing ; that's what this country is for. Not milk-selling, but butter-making ; then you've got all t'blue milk for calves. Now they've made it pay better to sell milk than make butter, so it all goes off t'farm. But where's t'young stock of t'country coming from ? There's none being reared here, only just enough on calf gruel to keep up farmer's own herd. But t'young things need t'mother's milk ; and mine shall have it.'

These boisterous uplands bred young cattle, as they did sheep, of great hardihood ; and the practice had been for dairymen from the south to come and buy their second-calf cows, which with high-feeding and a softer climate would do extraordinarily well, and provide the big cities with milk. Even so, this forcing for the urban market had a deleterious effect on the hardiest constitution in the long run. They

had tried sending these cows, worn-out by the process, back to the fell country to recuperate. But they could not imbibe a second dose of stamina: this time it merely finished them off.

Now, however, this trade in hardy maturing cows had diminished, and Fellside, like every other corner of England, had set up milk-stands at its gates. In this case there was the irony of making the old back-stones, whose oaten bread had kept teeth sound, bear the weight of more departing goodness, milk which was bone-forming and fattening for beast and man. The town returned to the farm in exchange, a gruel which if not administered correctly could poison the calves. And to the people, white flour.

Mrs. Rockfall stood out, though, for her own. She went on making some butter for her market customers (now registered): but more for the sake of blue milk for her calves. I understood now the source of her passionate interest in calves: it was traditional. She was a mother in no narrow sense. This fertile Fellside among the rocky hills was a real mother-land, both homely and austere.

'Where's t'young stock of t'country coming from?' I looked round also at the people sitting in this healthful air at tea. Where? Harvey was a bachelor.

He was a sort of Adam—without an Eve, unfallen. His sister kept his house. All his knowledge was in his body: his mind was as instinctive as his hand. He reared stock: he was one of the few, being too far from a road for milk transport. He and his farm were a reservoir of life.

After tea, backs and arms were getting tired, and we had difficulty in keeping up with the machine. Often it had to stop while Rockfall and Harvey helped finish tying the last sheaves of the previous round. But even if the sheaves were finished and out of the way before the horses came round again none of the family stood and waited. They were all the time picking up stray ears. The stubble was left as clean as a new brush. 'There'll not be much

gleaning here,' I said. They looked puzzled : they had never even heard of the word.

Suddenly our height was stormed. Glancing down, I saw twenty or more boys clambering up the Brow. It was the school from Coltrigg. They came, eager to see and take part. In five minutes all their backs were bent over sheaves, while they chattered like a flock of sparrows. The field was finished in fine style : two or three rabbits bolted out of the last strip, one of which Flash caught. The others fled over the Brow, down which the boys hurtled headlong in pursuit with wild yells, like a descent of the marauding Picts.

All departed : Harvey home, Mrs. Rockfall and George to milking, Molly to calf-feeding, Eileen to hens and domestic tasks ; leaving Rockfall and me alone in the field to stook the oats.

It seemed very quiet suddenly : here among the fallen sheaves, the day was peaceful and fulfilled. A cool air came across from the fell ; a flock of rooks passed cawing, and for the first time that year I had a premonition of autumn.

Up there just under the Beacon was something that had been the subject of Harvey's last remarks as he had turned for home. 'Ah, shows how time's going on.' They were lines of green which stood out at the edge of a big patch of green, which was of a deeper colour than that of the rough grass.

'They've started mowing brackens,' said Rockfall.

After the corn there was yet one more harvest : bracken for winter bedding.

We set up the sheaves together ; enormous, heavy sheaves. 'I am one for making o'er-big sheaves,' Rockfall admitted as we lugged them to the stooks. But despite the protests of the family he never altered the habit ; he merely admitted it. It was a long task, our stooking : many of the sheaves bound with more enthusiasm than dexterity by the boys dissolved as we stooped to lift them. 'You can tell who's been tying when you come to stand them up,'

Rockfall said. He compressed the sheaf with all his force of knee and arm re-tying it. 'I do like a tight-bound sheaf.' He was happy this evening : his first corn was cut ; things had gone well, and the weather seemed fine. He spoke of the pride in work of the men of his father's days, of the ribbons in the horses' tails when they went a journey, of how sheaves had to be bound just so. He himself was very particular in making the stooks—hattocks, they called them. I thought we were fairly adept at that in Suffolk ; but he would not have a sheaf leaning even a little ; it had to stand up straight, firmly based by a strong thrust of its butt into the stubble. He set them up as his father would have set them, or old Mr. Switch of Brant Farm. Despite the unevenness of the field they stood in straight lines. But not pointing just up and down the field. 'Sunrise to sunset,' he had said, as we lifted the first sheaves. 'Is that how you do it at home ?' I had to confess we were not so particular. But here every sheaf was set so as to catch the morning rays on one side and the afternoon ones on the other. So whatever the shape, aspect, or slope of the fields every stook in Fellside would be standing at exactly the same angle. In the case of this field the stooks stood somewhat obliquely to the square of the walls. 'Sunrise to sunset.' Here again I found what is so usual in husbandry ; some piece of traditional practice summed up in a phrase. In this case, I think, it must have been the climate that invoked it, the sun being so much more precious than in Suffolk where we expect it more often and so are not so particular in stooking. I noticed, during the hay-making, how sensitive they were to the way the wind touched or missed certain places in the fields, again due to the local configurations of the land ; while in flat Suffolk a wind that blows, blows most men's hay dry.

We heard a great deal of whistling as we worked ; it rang and echoed all about the little valleys.

Presently we saw Jimmy coming across the kale field with Harvey's pup in his arms. It was Harvey who had been whistling for it : we could see him now standing in his far meadow ; and made signs to him that the pup was found. It was of that age when it would follow anyone, the younger the better. It had stuck to Jimmy, till going down the Brow with the boys he had fetched up at the mill, where the pup had (as I learned that night) transferred its allegiance to Anthea and the twins. So hearing Harvey whistling, Jimmy and George also had started whistling from Brant Farm, till the whole of Fellside seemed to be whistling. Meanwhile the dog was quite at home assisting at the twins' bath.

'Harvey's been anxious, I know : he can't bear to lose an animal : he thinks a lot of his dogs. 'Twas he bred Rover.'

We sat and had our 'six o'clock', and Rockfall said : 'Harvey's a man for horses. He never raises his voice to a horse, breaking it in ; he'll seem to let it have its own way for long after anybody else'd be out of patience. Then he'll say, "Now, then, come on !" and 'twill set off with no more trouble.' He pointed to a square sloping field of Harvey's. 'Yon was a meadow last year, when order came to plough. He bought a wild "stag" (colt) that nobody could do anything with, and in a week he was ploughing t'new ground with it.' Rockfall added, rubbing his shock head. 'I'm not so good with horses : I don't mind them, though. But I'm not so good as Harvey.'

Here he was back in the old days, at the unfamiliar task of the corn. I had noticed how he drew his hand up the ears lingeringly, loth to let the sheaf go, though it was but to pick up another. 'They're bonny—ay, they're bonny.' So I had seen him stroke the forelock of old Rover. 'There was more people in Fellside once ; more labour, and they grew corn.' It had fallen away altogether till now. Next he was talking of loading his wool to carry to

market. And suddenly the sun would come out, and they would let it be, and go off to the hay field. 'And yonder,' he said, speaking of a farm I knew; 'That was three bonny farms when I was a boy—three families got a living off it.'

I asked if Harvey had much corn. 'A gey bit—eight acres.' And his other brother Joe, at the old home, he had four. If eight acres was 'a gey bit', fifteen was a vast amount; and the prospect of how to get it in before the short days still worried him. When we had finished setting up the sheaves they were a fine sight; quite different from a field of machine-tied ones. These had an old-fashioned yeoman look, bound with their own straw and its knot of ears. There is a certain flatness in a string-bound sheaf by contrast. I had never before seen a whole field of hand-bound corn: such big sheaves, bursting upwards from the clasp of straw. Here in fact was the sheaf that is only seen as a symbol, as a trade-mark. The sight gave me that same satisfaction that I had had in the tying.

Next day our task was even more arduous. We were cutting what was named Brant Field. Brant is a local word meaning steep: and when among the fells they call a field steep, they mean steep. Frankly, I disbelieved in the possibility of cutting it at all with the mower. But Harvey turned up again with his song, and the horses went well, and the machine did not overturn on the cross-journey, and Rockfall, leaning uphill and propped with one foot, somehow stayed on the canting seat. 'I hate sitting on that machine all day.' I could understand all that that implied.

This day, Nora and the children came up. Anthea's first remark was, 'Those horses aren't standing straight'; the machine being at an angle of forty-five degrees from them.

Oh, how one's feet at every step pressed down into the edges of one's shoes. It was only possible to cut two sides of the corn: the machine had to

slip the other two. I wondered at the strength of the horses—Fellside stamina: they were not overbig. But elephants could not have drawn that machine uphill in cutting gear. This corn was shorter than that in the top field, but Rockfall did not throw out any less of it to a sheaf; so we had to make sheaf-bonds. Those which I have here called bonds were not bonds in the true sense of the word, being just a single length of straw: but now, using the spread fingers of the left hand as a kind of frame, by half a dozen dexterous movements the ends of two bonds were woven together (they do it—I mean they used to do it—quite differently in Suffolk) and then laid on the ground, and the sheaf gathered in the arms and placed upon it. This took a little longer; but not much, considering the grunting and straining necessary to get the single bond to meet round the sheaf. Anyhow, as they cut only two sides of the field, there was plenty of time for us to finish tying before the horses came round again.

So everybody gleaned, and not a straw was left in the field. Anthea gleaned, and having gathered a little sheaf, asked me to tie it for her. It pleased her greatly, was a kind of doll, which she nursed for the rest of the afternoon.

Nora took a photograph of us, that this unbelievable harvesting should be recorded. But in the print the gradient appeared halved: it looked laborious but possible. Actually Rockfall said he had intended this piece of oats to be a fodder crop, to cut green; but while he was at the hay, it ripened. This was what added so to his corn acreage. Tea in this field was a problem: it would balance nowhere. Mrs. Rockfall just had to hug the tea-ewer all the time. Already cooler airs were blowing than we had known in the hay harvest. The tea vessel came in a special cosy made out of a patchwork of odds and ends, in which Rockfall's wedding trousers were recognized. As his honeymoon had been a short one, and no holiday had intervened in the

twelve years since, I presumed the moth had had them : at any rate he would not miss them, except if they failed to keep his tea hot. 'I'm a regular granny for tea,' he said, as he poured more into my cup. (He always had the handling of his big brown teapot at home.) 'There, he always does that,' Mrs. Rockfall cried. 'Fill your cup so full there's no room for t'milk.'

But the cutting and the binding of that field was as nothing to the stooking of it. 'Sunrise to sunset' the sheaves had to be stood, slope or no slope. I went slithering downhill, grasped a sheaf—an 'o'er-big' one—and climbed back again, dragging it. To stand up oneself was enough to do ; but besides, one had to lift the sheaf and bring it down smartly on its butt, and at the same time—and this was a difficult balancing trick—give it a sort of coaxing kick on the downhill side. So during part of the process one was—Rockfall was—actually standing on one leg. Of all the jobs of farming, I have never done anything so exhausting as setting up the sheaves on Brant Field. It involved, besides this kick, choosing every time a heavy and lighter sheaf : the heavier one to go below, the lighter above. Every pair of sheaves in those stooks—hattocks—was carefully mated. And so we got them all to stand.

And there they did stand day after day, through intervening storms, till they were carted. Very few fell : only an odd sheaf here and there, never a whole stook. It was an object lesson to me, who thought I knew something about setting up sheaves.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Rockfalls had ordered a new cart for the corn harvest ; but it had not arrived yet. It was a long, long journey up to the village, one not often

undertaken in busy harvest times. I had to go up there one day to the post office, to send off a parcel for Nora, so I called at the wheelwright's to enquire for the Rockfalls' cart. The village was a cluster of square stone houses under the fell: in winter it was isolated by the snows. Beyond it, a high bare road among sheep-walks wound for miles through apocalyptic scenery, till at last another fertile region was reached, with a village or two, a little town. Fellside was an outpost: the people were conscious of their situation. 'Tis a wild spot, is Fellside.'

The people: they consisted of a cluster of small trades dependent on farming; the trades that one reads of as being defunct to-day. 'As the horse gives place to the machine,' etc. But I found them hard at work. The cart? The wheelwright paused with perspiring brow, planing a felloe: yes, he would do his best to get it done in time. You see, he had orders for twenty carts. Twenty new carts had been ordered for harvest. The carts of the farmers of Fellside always did look new; they kept them so proudly, brightly painted. They glittered in the fields. Carts half-finished and nearly finished were in Mr. Boldrigg's yard, amid a lovely litter of new unpainted wooden parts; wheels, shafts, spokes, hubs, felloes. The thing he was working on at the moment was a new gig wheel, delicate and swift-looking even at rest. He was very pleased with his steel plane, American, which bent itself to the curve of the felloe as he planed it. He was a cheery man, fond of ironical jokes and hardy reminiscence. He was busier than was comfortable: he liked to bestraddle a corner of his bench and settle himself for a chat. A great believer in oats; an eater of porridge first thing and last thing every day, and of oatcake in between. He was a rosy, hardy man: his complexion was fair, delicate with the moist atmosphere, despite the storms.

'We hardly knew wheat bread when I was a boy:

oatcake and cheese and milk I was brought up on. Us lads used to wrestle on the green there, after work. Fine sport.'

He also kept the little shop opposite, where I went for oil for Nora. I had acquired the habit of carrying things miles on my back, as people did here: one got used to a load of two two-gallon cans of oil; and it was downhill homewards. Mrs. Boldrigg would sometimes be in the shop. She was to-day. She had taught in the school for forty years: she still taught her pupils' children; would soon be teaching their children's children. She had a clear, blue-grey look, like open weather. She taught the same things she had taught from the first, woven through and through with Christian virtue—*virtus*—stalwart, meant to last; even as her husband went on making his carts, repeating the curve of grace and strength upon them that he had learned. The clatter of the elder children's clogs was heard as they hurried by, later out of school than Mrs. Boldrigg's juniors. Even the infants wore clogs; sweet miniature things with their caps of brass. Behind one of the square grey cottages, built all together like a wall, the clog-maker sat in his shanty making and mending all the footwear of Fellside; above his head a pile of birchwood soles, sheets of leather beside him; upon his bench a row of finished work and of work waiting to be done. Although every day he delivered what he had made or mended, I never saw any diminution in the pile, for he collected as much as he delivered. This work dovetailed beautifully into his other job of postman; a walking, a sort of pilgrim, postman. He went out early with a staff and satchel, walked many miles over hills, through valleys, beside becks; returning and settling down to his cobbling in the afternoon. Mr. Boldrigg, when you came into his shop, would plump down with a 'Well, what d'you think of it?' Meaning everything in general, prepared to discuss the whole world. Mr. Melgill hardly looked up, received you

into the mesmeric silence of his sewing with a murmured greeting. The air was permeated with the tang of leather. The harness-maker likewise, in his little shop, sat white-aproned in his window. If you said something to him about modern times as the red bus speeded by, he assented with an expression of the face only. His heart was in his sewing, slowly moving along the leather seam ; there was something prophetic in his silent absorption ; he never looked up to wonder ; he simply went on. His quiet, I felt, was powerful, his sewing a most potent spell, sewing inexhaustibly out of himself, like a spider, all day long.

He and all of them were extremely busy : the new corn was ripening before their eyes. The blacksmith was shoeing a horse, other horses were waiting to be shod. Ploughs and harrows, brought for repair, were waiting till the more pressing work of putting the old rack-mowers into order was done. This task was continually being interrupted for shoeing. The blacksmith's son helped him : they both had that look of the eyes that comes of staring into fire. He was an approved army farrier, which meant he was a master of his trade, commissioned to make shoes for the cavalry when required. Unheard of here was the buying of horses' shoes ready-made, a custom the farriery of the lowlands has resorted to.

What struck me about this village was the absence of misgiving. Misgiving about the way the war was going just then, yes, certainly. But not misgiving about life. Though the red bus swept through daily, it never referred in their thoughts to anything beyond the road verge. The son followed the father in the forge, as many horses were in the fields, as many of Mr. Boldrigg's carts, as anybody could remember. It was the hills, of course, that conditioned the life ; and not even machinery could level the husbandry of this fertile space between the fells. The habit of moving in the old way, of making

the old curve, was unbroken. The post-office was the one addition, and that was half-absorbed into the rest, being a means of communication. Verbal messages about horses, harrows, harness, and shafts and wheels frequently passed to and fro by Mr. Melgill, costing no stamp. The lack of postal delivery daily would have been a much more serious hiatus than a mere interruption of letters.

How light-hearted one feels, relieved of a burden long carried. My shoulders ached and the muscles of my arms. I had tried my package on my back, on each shoulder in turn; even on my head, and wondered what ease costermongers and eastern ladies found in carrying things like that. It seemed to depress my brain-pan and telescope my neck: I soon gave it up. Now, having posted my parcel, my arms seemed so light that they might go floating away. I took another longer way back: it was by a road that grew gradually less, and at a gate ceased at last apparently to lead anywhere; one of Belton's gates, that biffed you through and banged behind you. And there, where everything seemed to end, stood Belton Hall, a Wuthering Heights sort of place, with a rare bit of tangled orchard facing across to its stone-walled rocky grazing lands. And there, I presumed, stood Mr. Belton himself, bare-headed. He was in his shirt sleeves, and had a pitchfork in his hand. As I came near, an aeroplane passed low overhead. He raised his fork to his shoulder and took aim with it at the aeroplane, as though it were a gun. After having seen it off the premises like that, he turned to me.

I said, 'It's all right, it's a friend.'

He answered, 'You never know, these days.'

I knew, roughly, his story. How the place had fallen more or less into ruin; his forebears having migrated to town in a time of depression: how he had worked hard in a city, intent all the time on buying back his heritage. At last he had done so, and here he and his family were all at home again.

'You've not much to fear from them, here,' I remarked, indicating the receding aircraft.

'Ah, but say t'Jerries was to land hereabout one night, with their parachutes and gliders—I keep my gun handy, I can tell you. And my sons are all in t'Home Guard.' His sons practically *were* the Home Guard. 'One stands up at Watch Farm on t'fell when moon's clear.'

Yes, they had always watched for the invaders coming down from above—from the fells, and now from the sky. The Hall was the ancient outpost : home-guarding was in the Belton heredity.

On my way along I met their big herd of cows coming to the milking, driven by two of the young men with guns tucked under their arms, and a beautiful young girl of about fifteen, with a branch in her hand. The yards of the Hall were stony enclosures flanked by the gaunt shippon walls with their white-washed doorways. Over one a silhouette of a horse had been painted, over another a cow ; the figures having the stiff exactitude of an old inn sign. The road beyond seemed to become a Belton road, gated with Belton gates : there were no walls between it and the pasturage that swept away to the huge swelling dome of Belton's fell—hundreds of acres of it, on which the bracken had already been mown, as we had seen from our harvest field. The road forked like a bough into wildward tracks. I took one of the tracks straight ahead and came to the ruin of Watch Farm. It consisted of two stone sheep folds and a building which would not have looked like a habitation but for a crumbling stone chimney at one end. It had been half-barn, half-home. There was a stove in a corner, and above, remains of bedroom wallpaper, though there was no longer any upper floor. Hay was stored in the other end. A broken window framed, in extraordinary contrast to the grey expanse of fell grass, a scene that might have come out of a carefully planned landscape garden. It was Nature's work that the

gardener seeks to copy. A course of water from the fell-top had worn a deep groove in the land which followed its bends. It formed here a delightful little dell, carpeted with lawn-like grass, the stream sparkling in tiny waterfalls over flat stones. Clumps of gorse bloomed brilliantly, and foxgloves grew out of mossy crevices between the rocks. Where the stream bent sharply was a green terrace from which rose a graceful young rowan tree with reddening berries. Nothing could have been arranged, composed, more effectively : it was all a picture, green, yellow, and purple among the soft grey of stone and diamond flashes of the perpetual movement of water. The work was Nature's entirely ; a garden without labour. The dip of a few feet made all this possible : the murderous winds swept harmlessly over ; here Nature delighted itself. That was the scene to which those had looked out who had inhabited this place long years ago ; here their children had sunned themselves, laid their lips to the stream that flowed by. For the rest, sheep, snow, and wind.

Now Harry Belton farmed it in partnership with his father : he had his own flock of sheep. He looked young—I met him on my way back—hardly more than a boy. But a man here was adult before he was out of his teens, managing these things.

'I lie up here in lambing time,' Harry Belton told me. Close to his sheep-folds.

I walked up the beck that evening to gather water-cress for supper. It grew in profuse patches along the margin ; and on my way home that afternoon, I had spotted a good bed of it. I had picked a big bunch, when I saw something silvery come sailing down the stream. Eileen was coming out of a hen-house with eggs. I called to her and pointed to the thing. She went to the water's edge where the bank shelved, and gathered it up, a fresh young salmon, newly killed, speared it seemed, and lost by a poacher.

Anthea thought it a most beautiful thing, as Eileen brought it in to show her and laid it on the

table. Anthea had no sense of death apart from stillness. When she saw a rabbit hanging from a nail on a cottage wall, she said, 'I suppose they put it there to stop it running away.' But she could not look at a flower whose petals had fallen. When the petals of a bowl of roses lay on the table around the bowl, she kept her face averted, and cried, 'Take it away : I don't like it when they take off their petals.' But the silver-scaled salmon, lugubriously dead about the face, fascinated her. And she was very pleased, the next day, to eat a slice of it.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

'Oats should see three Sundays in the field ; that's what we say in Suffolk,' I told Rockfall, to match his 'Sunrise to sunset'. He nodded, but thought that that was quite long enough. They were too anxious about the weather here to have anything so rigid as a maxim about it. Those first two fields had now stood a fortnight, and the family was wishing them safely home. But the new cart had not yet arrived. The interval had mostly been spent in the flat little oat-field of Beck Mill land, where the valley of the beck widened for its meeting with another. Here was a strange tangle. The winds, which had not harmed the corn on the hill, had seemed to pounce upon this from all directions, eddying into the hollow. Rockfall, coming from there one morning after a rough night, said, 'Tis a terrible mess ; wind seems to have set it all up in hattocks-like.' What of the corn was not flat had been reared up against itself, just as where the two becks joined and the cross-currents made white waves.

Long days we spent there with scythes in steamy sun, mowing the twisted corn and making sheaves taller than ourselves, that flopped and dragged. Handling each one was like moving a wardrobe full of

clothes. They were untidy and rank ; you could make no sort of shape of them. It was like Keats's 'Ode to Autumn' all the time ; warm, drowsy, over-ripe. We moved among groves of them set in stooks, invisible to each other. We sat with our tea-basket in the lush grass by the beck, with the rooks settled on the hills above, eyeing us, and waiting for theirs.

The family discussed the carting of Top Field and Brant Field. There was nothing for it but to take the one cart up there and make a start. What a few of these fat sheaves went to a load of that shallow dainty cart ! And what a time it took to get home and back : three loads seemed hardly to have nibbled at it. Yet the weather presented a golden opportunity, and the crop was very important to them.

The last time we had worked in this field, setting up the sheaves, Rockfall had been happy. Now he was silent, feeling the magnitude of the task, as was even Mrs. Rockfall too. And then suddenly, everything altered. Approaching across the valley from Harvey's farm were two carts being pulled by two brisk horses, with two men each leading a horse. We could have cheered. One of the men was Harvey—his vibrant gait was perceptible to us even from here—the other was brother Joe. The strenuous horses—that was Bonny, one of Mettle's, in front—bowled the bright-painted carts along. In that moment of sighting them we realized how the problem of harvest had been solved. Without any spoken agreement, the whole family was to be one in co-operation for the corn. They all farmed separately : it was the corn that had done it. Harvey was really the prime mover, who farmed the farm in the middle there. He had come over to help with the cutting ; had seen us start the carting alone, and sent word to Joe. They arrived ; and no time was lost in grateful speeches.

So now we had the three carts and a complete harvest gang. Rockfall and his wife stayed at the

stack ; I and one of the girls pitched the sheaves, Joe loaded, and Harvey drove the carts to and fro. Harvey's, of course, was the most skilled job of all, as I discovered when we started carting Brant Field. He controlled both horse and cart down the perilous descent, giving first a look to see his best way, then getting his forearm flat along the shaft, gripping the bridle, and giving the word to go. Once started, there was no stopping till the bottom was reached, where the cart bumped on to the stone track, and bumped and juddered all the way to the barn. At moments I saw the whole load apparently rise into the air, despite the rope, and return to the cart again. But most I saw how Harvey was at home with it ; how the very configurations of the ground had made the man. More than ever, the controlling of Bonny with a load of sheaves down that steep slope gave his body blitheness. He laid our course for us. Our task was not just loading sheaves : it was a complicated manoeuvre. We took a few sheaves from one place ; went skewing across the slope, made a quick turn before the load was too big, and finished going downwards. Or we started near the bottom, worked a few sheaves uphill, then turned across and down again. The first sheaves that we pitched to Joe in Brant Field, as fast as he laid them on the back ladder, slid off at the side. We had to skew the cart a bit and try again. Every time we moved forward to fresh stooks, both Molly and I had to hang on to the cart by the upper side to prevent it overturning. The slope of the ground was accentuated by the fact that the wheel on the lower side sank in as the cart stood ; so we had to lose no time forking up the sheaves at each place.

Nor were the horses inclined to stand. They each had their peculiarities. During those few weeks of harvest I came to know those horses as if they had been humans. I shall never think of Fellside, but I shall think of Willie and Bonny and Royal. Willie, patient to stand, but whose idea of putting forth

extra strength for an uphill pull was to try and gallop. Bonny, who, as soon as you had her and the cart set nicely between the stooks, would drag forward to the downhill stook ahead and begin a meal. Joe had a wonderful vocabulary of monition, local and traditional, poured forth in a rapid falsetto, of which I did not understand a word, but only that it sounded rather musical, and might easily have been mistaken for an impetuous proposal of marriage in Spanish, especially when he sent his dog to chase away some sheep that had come in among the stooks. 'Dinna' know what wee means?' he cried, as Bonny's cart went slewing away downhill again. 'Wee' being 'wey', being 'woa'. Apparently not, but she would stand any length of time munching oats; and we just had to let her go her way to them; though Joe would not give up a token sigh or groan of protest as he was jerked across the load. If you passed in front of Bonny she would swing round from the oats and try and take a bite out of you. Said Harvey, coming up with the empty cart just as Bonny's teeth met in the air half an inch from my left ear, 'I'm glad to see her do that; because her mother used to snap at you when she was in foal, never any other time. So perhaps Bonny is too.'

Royal was Joe's horse, and he, too, had his peculiarities. The chief was that at the touch of a sheaf on his back he would jump violently, and probably set off at a brisk walk, as much as to say, 'I'm going home'. We had no margin of equilibrium for these tricks. The laying of the first row of sheaves on the forward ladder, which overhung his back, was a delicate matter. Joe would creep forward, murmuring soothing phrases, and lay the sheaf on so softly it made hardly a crackle. One, two, three, four, five. Then he turned and started hustling and stamping about the load as before. We were glad when Royal and his load were safely handed over to Harvey, and we took in exchange the empty cart and docile Willie. 'Who is it next time?'

Molly would ask. 'Royal! Oh! I don't like that great brute.' It made quite a difference to her spirits.

We finished the field without mishap, and came home with the last load. There, I expected to see a stack of all these sheaves we had been forking. Instead, beside the dutch barn, I saw a pyramidal object, not more than a few yards in diameter at its base, and tapering all the way up to the massive figure of John Rockfall with which it was crowned. He stood there as on a monument, while his wife on the cart below prepared to fork up to him yet another sheaf if only he could get his feet out of the way so as to place it under him. It was a pretty domestic scene, but static; for there was nowhere to put that sheaf which waited half-way to him. Every time he moved his feet the pyramid swayed precariously. 'I'd better get off,' he said.

We held everything—ladder, stack, and Rockfall while he descended. From the cart he capped the stack with some old hay and a piece of tin. We stood around the first corn-stack many people had seen in Fellside, and felt that it was an occasion. I realized then that the girth of the base of the stack was not of Rockfall's choosing: it was the only level piece of ground. The boys, who had been playing monkeys or squirrels in the dutch barn, much to Eileen's indignation—'Young scamps, they're climbing up t'hay mow'—came sliding down by one of the wooden posts and looked at the corn pyramid with the eye of opportunity. They were solemnly warned off it; and I think even they were awed into obeying.

The end of the barn contained the rest of the corn we had carted. The last few sheaves on the cart were added to it, and we went indoors to supper. Supper consisted of rabbit-pie. That was what Mrs. Rockfall called it. It contained two rabbits, one fowl, two pounds of beef, and an unspecified amount of bacon. Outside, the rain was just beginning to come down.

Thus ended the carting of that perilous field.

Next day the sun shone again, and now it was we who looked in Harvey's direction. Presently somebody reported that Harvey and his sister had gone out into their cornfield. We could see what they were doing. Rockfall and I set off toward them. When we came to Harvey's field, Joe had arrived and taken the sister's place. They were turning over the stooks, scattering the sheaves and splaying out their butt ends to the wind and sun. 'Hallo,' cried Harvey jovially, 'haven't you had enough of it yet?' This was his salute to me every time we met on the harvest field. He did not expect me to endure the exhausting Fellside conditions for long. Certainly I had had enough of his cornfield after the first row of stooks. For the butts of his sheaves were full of thistles, and to plunge one's fist into them with the force needed to open them out was acutely painful. But having put my hand to it, and with Harvey's words still ringing in my ears, I must go on. I looked at the size of the field; I glanced at the others, with whom I must of course keep up, and that allowed of no careflessness in the handling of the sheaves which might have mitigated the agony. Rockfall—ah, wretch—drew from his pocket a pair of black leather gloves that looked as though they might once have been his wife's. (As it was he wore her clogs.) Armed with these he punched sheaves open with gusto. Harvey's hands had apparently no feeling whatever, for he worked as fast as Rockfall. Joe, though, looked a bit uncomfortable, I thought, and tended to be a little behind the others. I strove to keep up with Joe. I shall get used to the pricks, I thought: but I didn't; they went into my flesh like needles. There was an hour's work here, at least. Harvey called, 'A bit sharp, are they? My sister Harriet said so.' He said he had some gloves, hedging gloves, somewhere in the barn, if I'd care for them. Obstinate the answer, 'No, don't trouble,' slipped from me. I

couldn't be a nuisance, making him go hunting for gloves. He wanted to be carting this before night.

I tried wrapping my fist in my handkerchief. Quite useless. Then I had an idea. Years ago, when on holiday, I bought a hat. Nothing but a holiday would ever bring me to the point of doing that. For a brief period it tried to be smart, then it became frankly disreputable. I stuck to it, and in course of time it ceased to be disreputable : it became just my hat. No one could remember a time when I had worn any other. My hat, it was tough. And here it was, still on my head. This was its hour : I gave it my fist to wear. I battered it into those sheaves : not a thistle penetrated. I forged ahead. It was some time before Joe could come up with me. When he did, I saw that he had copied me : but he had only a cap. When we finished the field I put my hat back on my head. There it still is ; the same shape as before.

Then we started to load our cart, which Rockfall had brought with him, while Joe went to fetch his. Young George was sent to catch Bonny for Harvey, who was on top of the load, so that she should be ready to put in the cart when he got back to the yard. 'Do you think you can ?' young George was asked. Yes, he thought so, and away he went to try. The two men watched him from the field above. It was a sort of test. We saw him go out to her with a bowl of oats in one hand and a halter in the other. She came to him, and as she dipped her nose to the oats, he slipped the halter over her head. 'Good boy,' Harvey ejaculated, half to himself, seeing how quietly he did it ; and Rockfall was pleased.

Harriet came driving out the other cart with Bonny, while Harvey unloaded Willie's. She drove standing up in the bright cart, against the background of the Beacon, with a cloud towering over that. 'There's streamers from the sun,' she called, and we came out of our preoccupation with the

corn to gaze upon the cloudscape of rays shining into the interstices of the valleys. 'Tis said to be a sign of rain.' Later, another sister took her place, while she went to prepare the tea-basket. This one's name was Mary: she lived with the mother and Joe. She was the youngest, only twenty, while Harvey the eldest was getting on for fifty by the look of him: it was a big family. Mary was somewhat my idea of Jefferies' Amaryllis, with ankles 'justly proportioned to what would soon be a fine form; strong, but neither thick, nor coarse, nor heavy—that would carry her many a mile without weariness.' She forked up sheaves tirelessly. You would not see many women forking up sheaves and hay as expertly as these Fellside wives and daughters, if you travelled all England. You would not say to yourself, watching them, 'that's no work for a woman.' They looked easy and festive in their pink and blue frocks beside the red carts of corn. I enjoyed this domestication of the harvest fields: it brought bread and corn so close together. I liked to see this young woman's strong brown arm swell with pulling on the rope below while Joe pulled above.

Between the loads, I leaned on the wall and looked across to the Rockfall home-farm where Mary lived, standing square and white in its hollow meadow as in the green palm of a hand. It had a geometrical neatness emphasized by the whitewashed walls of yard and house and buildings. Its angularity looked natural in this stone country; as does the rather haphazard Suffolk farm-house among its old trees and straw stacks. The signature of Suffolk building is a wayward bough, trimmed with the adze but never quite subdued; incorporated, rather: its gentle bulge imposes itself on the whole structure.

There is something fascinating to me about a home in which a family has lived for over a hundred years. I gazed at that farmstead, with its continuity of purpose, while Mary talked, well aware of

the hundred years and more that were behind her in the place. She had a sheep-dog puppy—one of Harvey's—which had followed her into the field. She said, 'He's always running off with my brushes.' She meant her scrubbing brushes.

Harriet brought the tea in a basket with a lid and latch all of wicker-work. It was a thorough piece of work, old but still strong—a bit of the old home in fact, which had done this service for many harvests. Inside, it was a sort of nest, lined with a white cloth. I enjoyed my tea out of the white cloth, which had an expert darn in it in one place. The pasty was still warm from the oven. Harvey, however, was dissatisfied. This rough-hewn man who plunged his bare hands among thistles, did like to be comfortable when he rested. We were on a slope; the tea-jug would not stand; there was no shade, and only a hard wall to lean against. But the tea was good.

There was soon plenty of shade: the cloud from the Beacon spread low over us. The rest of the carting of that field was the long-drawn-out suspense of imminent downpour. Every load it seemed must be the last. It did actually begin to drizzle, but we went on, as there were only a few loads left. We had a different horse to-day from Royal: his name was Jock. Jock did not jump when a sheaf touched his back; on the contrary, when we had the cart loaded and ready, he just refused to move at all. He stood there like a thing of wood, neither prodding nor pulling, nor coaxing nor cursing, made the slightest impression. Then suddenly he gave a snort and started off at full speed. Half-way across the field he stopped, as suddenly, as utterly. There we three were, rather foolishly, when Harvey came into the field with the empty cart. Nothing makes one feel quite so impotent as a horse that will not move. One that shies, or kicks or bites, or goes backward, you can struggle with; it is man against horse: but one that stands and refuses even to notice you is humiliating. It was Joe's horse, a recent acquisi-

tion ; but Joe had no more authority over it than I had. Joe felt sore. Joe, I felt, would have an ideal team if Jock were Royal and Royal Jock. Now, what could Harvey do ? There, Harvey was having no more success than we. Then, of a sudden, there came from far away a whinny. Off went Jock like an express. Harvey's luck, I suppose. Once he had him on the move, Harvey's striding urgency alongside, pouring itself into him in a flow of imperatives, kept him going.

Real rain came with dusk : Mary had gone home to milk. It was dark as our last load came lurching down the steep track, almost over the roof of Harvey's farm-house, into his barn. Horses, carts, and men were gathered in that darkness ; the last load but one was being rustled into the bay ; ours was to stand on the cart. Something came down heavily on my toes : it was the trestle on which to rest the shafts. A horse began stamping on the wooden floor. I withdrew and came up against an unseen flank ; lips snapped together by my cheek : Bonny. I thought it was a great thing when people knew their place so well that they could harvest in their barn in darkness, among horses, carts, and dogs. Not even for one night was even an empty cart left out in the rain. The rustling of sheaves ceased : now a number of feet were sounding on the wood. Stamping and rattling of chains. Candlelight gleamed weakly from the windows of the house (Fellside had hardly yet begun to be concerned about a black-out, and we were far from any road here), and the dim silhouette of Harriet stood bidding us in. 'Where'll you put Willie ?' 'Oh, in the parlour,' answered John Rockfall. Everybody laughed at this : and some days later when we were at the home-farm and the same question was asked, he made the same reply, with undiminished effect.

Meantime calves and cows had broken from their pastures and surrounded the steading, bleating and mooing, and demanding attention.

We went into the back-kitchen, whose snowy whiteness of new whitewash brightened the candle ; and there the men flung off their coats, rolled up their sleeves at the sink, and splashed and spluttered and rubbed and talked through lather and through towels. Though they had been together all day, there was still a great deal to talk about, of their farming. They brushed their hair and went into the kitchen, the living room, a low-ceilinged, ample apartment, with a round table directly under the lamp, spread with a supper of eggs, oatcakes, cheese, and several kinds of cakes and pasties. On the shining stove stood a large tea-pot. The fire gave almost as much light as the lamp, and the two cats sat worshipping it in a doze on a scrap rug. Harvey's sheep-shears hung on the opposite wall, gleaming with the light, and his gun was over the fireplace. There was a rocking-chair, a sofa, and a piano in a corner. A row of boots stood on a shelf ; a great many boots, all heavy and apparently unwearable-out, even here. All this must have been familiar to his ancestors : the shears on the wall, the gun, the supper of home-grown food in fire-light. But then something occurred, most ordinary to us, which would have made the ancestors' hair stand on end. 'There's news in t'parlour,' Harvey muttered, looking at the clock. Harriet disappeared into blackness : in a minute out of the blackness came music—the end of a piece by Couperin, and then a voice. After a few minutes Harriet went in again : the voice stopped in the middle of a word. A chill came out of that black doorway. Harriet, returning into the light, shut the door ; and we were warm in our world of harvest again. Conversation immediately joined up around it. Harvey went on to tell me how he would thresh all his crop with a flail, because he was too far away from a road for a threshing machine to come to him. 'Won't it take a long time ?' I asked. He said he would have plenty of time ; for in winter the snow covered his shippon

doors, and reached half-way up the big doors of his barn.

It was raining hard as we rose to go. Harvey insisted on my taking his greatcoat. 'You can keep any five-pound notes you find in t'pockets,' he said, as he lifted it on to my shoulders. It was rough, heavy, and warm: I felt wrapped in Harvey. Rockfall fetched Willie out of the shippin where he had tied him among the cows, and we set off across the fields in pitch darkness. Suddenly I felt snorts of hot breath on my face. 'Tis young bull: Harvey said look out for him in this field,' came Rockfall's voice.

Next day we filled a barn of Harvey's that stood in a farther field, the one where we had laid the lame sheep. As we went to it, Rockfall said, 'Joe's getting anxious about his: we must try and lead his to-day, too.' I sympathized with Joe: these days when he had been working for his brothers would have sufficed for him and Mary to have led theirs safely home.

Harvey enjoyed his tea to-day, sitting outside his barn, which we had just finished filling. 'I'm enjoying this,' he said. 'I didn't yesterday.' He spread himself out over the tea-basket, unpacking its good things. There was a piece of flat ground to sit on, to which he ascribed his enjoyment; but I think the gathering of his harvest had more to do with it. We climbed into the carts afterwards and went on to Joe's. There we worked with redoubled energy, to make up for his waiting. Mary was forking with me in the field. It was a promising crop; about three acres of it, which had all been mown with the scythe, and packed into straight sheaves, and the sheaves put up into regular stooks that stood so close they nearly touched one another where the corn was best. To Mary and Joe that sight was already a memory of labour. 'I thought we should never come to the end of it,' Mary said. 'How my back ached. Though mother came to help.'

I was startled at that. Mother; the mother of

Harvey : I had a picture of her in my mind as one very withered and old, sitting indoors.

We had the now familiar problems of manœuvring the cart about the field : it had a perilous dip in it. After Brant Field, all the other harvest fields of my memory seem flat ; but I know we had to do much considering and skilful turning on these others, taking a few sheaves from one place and a few from another.

We finished Joe's field by dusk, though it was a long way to and from the farm. Harvey hustled the horses along ; Jock, Royal, and Willie. On the way home with the last load, Mary stooped beside a stone wall built into the hill-side, from which a spring of water poured into a clear pool below. She filled two buckets to carry home, for their house being on a piece of flat ground, water did not flow that way in summer. Hard work had not banished natural grace, I saw, as she stooped there under the mossy stones in her pink frock. She did not know what a vision of abiding youth she became.

The cows were yet to be fetched up ; and though they had been a continual nuisance to us that afternoon, invading the gateway and trying to steal the corn, now they were wanted they were nowhere to be seen. So in the deep dusk we wandered over the pastures calling the cattle ; till we stood on a lip of ground with nothing visible but a lake of mist below us. I found I was separated from Mary : I heard her somewhere in the lake of mist, calling. I was completely lost. Suddenly the cows appeared one after the other like dim submarine shapes ; and I followed them in the last of the light, and was led to the farmyard. Here was a stir of unseen horses and men. There was a warning call from Rockfall about moving a ladder.

'Come in,' a woman's voice said to me, as I passed by the house. 'Work should end with daylight, on a farm.' I found myself in another of those snow-white sculleries in candlelight, and the woman

who was talking to me was, must be, the mother of all the Rockfalls. 'I always say there should be time enough in t'day: I don't agree with this working outside after dark: 'tis dangerous.' She was immersing me in clouds of steam from water which she poured for washing. She was thanking me at the same time for helping. She was an upright, vigorous old lady, in cap and apron, with a way of bobbing forward when she laughed, which she often did, that was like the beginning of a curtsy. She was the merriest of all the family I had met—not excepting Harvey. She laughed and talked, and when I had washed, led the way into the kitchen, a small cosy room that seemed to be all fireplace, where a supper of egg-salad, bacon, and the best oatcakes and cheese I have ever tasted was prepared. Joe and Mary ate theirs half-sitting on the dresser, for they had yet to do the milking: Mrs. Rockfall sat in a rocking-chair by the polished stove, and every time there was a joke she set the chair rocking with her laughter. It was a homely room, her room for generations, full of gleaming life: my chief memory of it is of the firelight dancing on polished table-legs and surfaces of wood: it was full of firelight, as she was full of laughter. I had difficulty in realizing that all who sat here were her family, she seemed so contemporary with them, in years and spirits. She had something else—an old-fashioned courtesy, as of Cranford without its finickiness, which I had least expected to meet amid the rough circumstances of the fells. The house had a small front garden with lilac bushes, and the walls that surrounded both garden and yard were whitewashed, giving it something of a foreign look.

I was sorry to bring my short sojourn under that roof to an end: but it was half-past nine; Harvey had gone home, and Joe and Mary were at their milking. John Rockfall fetched Willie, and again I followed the horse's white hind-foot through the darkness of unknown fields. I was thankful for that

white foot. At last we came through Harvey's yard. I saw Harriet's dim figure in the doorway. 'We've lost two calves : he's gone to look for them.'

'Have you milked yet ?'

'No.'

We came at last to the end of the family harvest, with the carting of that tangled and scrawly crop of John Rockfall's in the mill field. Although the field itself was flat, the sheaves were awkward to load, and it was necessary to cross the beck twice to get them as far as the mill barn. But the barn was half-full of hay, so Rockfall made a stack of the oats on a small plateau beside the beck. Harvey was our man even more than before, for the tossing the load received as the cart lurched over the boulders in the beck was worse than anything from the stony tracks. Harvey both led the horse and cart over, and got himself over dry-shod : he leaped from stone to stone in his slippery clogs, wherever one stood out of the water. He did this twice each journey. He rode in the cart returning to the field. Eileen was with me forking to-day. First we had pushed the sheaves over, to dry their butts. As we did so, Harvey remarked that he must have a lot of thistle-points in his fingers from the sheaves in his field, because now they felt quite numb, though he had not noticed at the time.

While we were at it, a young neighbour came with two horses and a mower into his field which reared up beside the mill land, and began cutting some grass.

'A gey bit of grass there for cutting,' said Harvey.

'Sheep were on it till a fortnight since,' Rockfall remarked.

Certainly there did not seem much to cut, but the young man made a big to-do about it, cutting strange patterns in the hill-side, as he skirted portions that were too steep to mow. He went on all morning, shouting and flourishing his whip as he went down, around, and up the hilly places. At an interval in our carting he would stop and talk to Eileen through

the hedge. Then away again with a crack of the whip and a whoop. It was a fine exhibition of horsemanship for a cart-load of hay.

'I'll get you a good supper,' Mrs. Rockfall said, as she brought out our tea. She apologized for there being no cake, only new bread, custard tarts, and pasties. The tea seemed particularly full of insects to-day : Eileen's hens came round and almost pecked the food from our hands. The sheaves were heavy to load : Royal had the jumps ; but we were getting through the field. After tea, Molly relieved Eileen. At seven o'clock we had only two more loads to get. But then, instead of the returning empty cart, we saw the figure of young George, alone in the gateway. He called to us. What ? Then, unmistakably we heard, 'Stack's fallen into beck.'

What a scene of despair greeted us at the mill. Even Harvey looked grim. The pyramidal object of a corn-stack, which it had taken our hard day's labour to build, lay sprawled across the beck like a dam. Luckily the water was very low, and the sheaves had formed a sort of bridge where a big rock jutted out ; otherwise the water must have risen and swamped the lot. The heavy twisted sheaves in falling had interlocked into a solid mass. Everyone stood round, weighed down by the disaster. Only Jimmy could not repress his acrobatic spirit, and balanced himself on the remains of a wall which had collapsed with the stack. There was nothing to do but try and retrieve as much as possible before nightfall. Rockfall climbed down on to the prostrate stack and stuck his fork into it and heaved as though he would lift the whole thing up bodily. The fork-stick broke : he fell backwards, and at the same moment Jimmy started an avalanche of stones which carried him down with them, and rolled him on to his father. I saw Mrs. Rockfall turn quickly away, unable to resist humour even in this situation. What Jimmy's father said to Jimmy I did not understand ; it was in pungent dialect.

We made a chain of people, passing up the sheaves which Rockfall heaved out of the mass. Already most of them had been handled and shaken about as much as they could stand. Time and again, instead of the sheaf coming up, the bond fell away and it scattered back upon Rockfall. We made two little stacks beside the stump of the first one. Then we came to the really wet sheaves. They were like lead.

Instead of that grand supper we should have had to celebrate our harvest home, Mrs. Rockfall and Eileen brought us sandwiches and coffee at our toil. Eileen had some disastrous bit of war news from the radio ; but that was nothing to us now.

'That was a queer shop to put stack, right against beck,' she remarked.

'I tell you there weren't any other shop,' her father replied, munching and gulping. Certainly there was no other piece of level ground on the mill side of the beck. -

The brothers departed at last to their milking. I can see them now, with their horses and painted carts, a receding procession up the steep way to Brant Farm. We were a sad little party, alone in darkness, with that mass of wet sheaves. We gave up. We surveyed the three flat bits of stack that were dry ; and just hoped that neither rain nor Mr. Ransom's cows would fall upon them. By luck, neither did.

The next day the rest of the wet sheaves were retrieved, and the dry ones rebuilt. This time Rockfall was careful to see that the stack did not lean towards the beck. He said as he built it, ' 'Twas because of having three carts going ; you've no time to turn round. With one or two you could straighten up between loads.' I agreed that there was something in that. Nevertheless the stack which he had rebuilt with time and care, began to lean forward across the track to the mill by that evening. In the morning it was nodding over at a perilous angle, and Mr. Ransom's cows had found

it and were tearing out great mouthfuls, having easily stepped through the two strands of barbed wire Rockfall had erected. I hurried up to the farm. There I was met by Mrs. Rockfall descending a ladder with a hammer in her hand. She had been mending a guttering. I told her, 'You'd better knock Mr. Ransom's cows on the head with that, they're eating your stack. And it's going to fall again.'

Rockfall had gone to the fell for the day, to see to his sheep, so Mrs. Rockfall, Molly, and I spent the morning building a kind of corset of tin and planks all round the stack, till it seemed impossible either for it to fall or for the cows to get at it.

But by the next morning it had fallen across the track. Another day was spent forking up those sheaves yet again, what was left of them. No more stacks for Rockfall, though. He filled the barn with some, and carried the rest up to Brant Farm. He and Tom Paterson were forking the last of them into his new cart as I passed that way, setting out to return to Suffolk once more.

So ended the corn harvest.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

When I next visited Fellside I found them on the eve of their last harvest. 'To-morrow,' Rockfall said as they sat at tea, 'we'll go brackening.'

Before I had time to ask him more about this, Mrs. Rockfall, who was sitting facing the window, exclaimed, 'Here's Uncle Billy, and he's got a present for us, looks like.'

From where I sat I could not see out of the window, but Mrs. Rockfall's description suggested to my mind a jolly sort of man with a parcel under his arm, fairly

prosperously dressed—for I knew him to have done well in the town milling business from which he had retired. They all crowded to the window, and then to the door. I was surprised when I reached it to see a man in a wide, tanned, straw hat, and a plaid cape, carrying a crooked stick shoulder high. Jolly, yes; but the present to which Mrs. Ransom had referred was four white-roan heifers that he and his dog were driving.

'Hey—what do you think of them?' he cried to Mrs. Rockfall, with a wave of the great crook. She was soon beside her brother, surveying them, smiling with pleasure at the gift. I saw a strong family likeness: his was a face of shrewd, solid good humour, like hers, though somewhat squarer.

'Hullo, Eileen, still here?' he called to his niece as she appeared from the house. I did not catch the meaning of this at the time. It was that a friend had suggested that Eileen should give up the rough life of the farm and go and live with her as companion in her neat house in a neat seaside resort, with the inheritance of a sufficiency to keep her in the circumstances of a lady. Everything about the offer seemed advantageous, and nothing prevented her from accepting it; only it happened that day followed day and week followed week on the farm, and she was still here, calculating the number of eggs she would have for market on Saturday, and thinking out means of keeping the rats from the corn. There was a touch of that irony in Uncle Billy's remark which his sister had. Irony not at Eileen for staying, but at the whole idea of the offer in its suggestion that the old life was not good enough. For of all unlikely places for a town miller to retire to—a man who had made his money out of a modern roller-mill—Uncle Billy had chosen an old water-mill like Beck Mill, deep in a quiet valley. Truly the life of the racing waters was in the family blood, from their early foster-home on the Lune. Such a mill had been Uncle Billy's first one: he understood the

whole business of flood and mill-stones, and in his retirement it was his pleasure to return to the art of it, also to rear young stock and summer them on his few acres. Then in the autumn he appeared like this with presents for his sister, his only stipulation being that he should have the choice of their heifer calves.

Mrs. Rockfall was saying: 'We'll see what luck we're going to have this time.'

'Heifers or bulls?' asked Uncle Billy.

'I'll tell you in a minute.'

'What do you mean?' I asked her.

'What—haven't you seen 't done afore? Would you like to wager a pound on each beast with me, on whether 'tis to have bull or heifer calf?' she said as she was disappearing into the house. She was out again in a minute. 'Now.' She produced a needle and thread.

'There's not enough there to sew them up again after you've had a look inside,' I said.

Uncle Billy laughed, bringing his stick down thump on the ground, which set the heifers moving. 'Get 'em into yard,' said Mrs. Rockfall. Once in the yard they stood quiet, and Mrs. Rockfall went up to one and suspended the needle over its flank on the full length of the thread. Everybody stood silent, their eyes fixed on the needle. Nothing happened for a minute, then slowly the needle began to swing. It gathered momentum, going round in a circle. 'There, look!' Mrs. Rockfall said to me, 'tis a bull calf.'

'What if it was a heifer?' I asked.

'Then t'needle'd swing from side to side. Look here now.' She was trying it on the next beast. At the second and at the third heifer it moved unmistakably in an ellipse, and Mrs. Rockfall diagnosed heifer calves. The fourth was to be another heifer.

'We're in luck,' Mrs. Rockfall said. Seeing I was still rather sceptical, she gave me the needle and thread and said, 'Try it yourself.' I held it over the

flank of a heifer. Whatever occult power it worked by was lacking in me : it remained as dead and inert as a needle hanging from a piece of cotton.

'Well, that's a funny thing,' Mrs. Rockfall exclaimed.

'I should say it's an ordinary thing—it's the funny thing it does with you.'

She laid her arm along mine, and held my hand. At once the needle began to swing on the end of the thread.

'Would you like to wager I'm wrong?' she asked.

Uncle Billy and the others admitted that they had never known her to be wrong in forecasting the sex of a calf like that.

There was general satisfaction at the prospect of three heifers to one bull, and as Uncle Billy had not had tea, we all went in with him and had another.

'Mill-stones are dressed,' he said: 'where's thresher?'

That was what all were now waiting for; the small threshing outfits which the government had promised to send to thresh out the miniature crops. The thresher had to be small in order to negotiate the hills and precipitous tracks: each was pulled and worked by a tractor. Of course it would not have paid a private firm to have hauled a tackle about here and there to thresh twenty sacks at a time.

'I don't know,' said John Rockfall, 'I've heard there's one about. But think you they'll come to us?'

'They'll never get over t'bridge at bottom of t'meadow,' said Molly, referring to an old pack bridge over their beck at the foot of a steep drop—the only route to their farm from the high road.

'You'll have to knock corn out wi' sticks then,' said Uncle Billy; 'or against t'rungs of a ladder, like I saw my grandfather do once.'

'We shall have to knock out corn at Beck Mill by hand, any road,' remarked Rockfall.

'If they come here with thresher, tell them they can go on down there,' Mrs. Rockfall advised.

'They'd never get that thing over beck,' cried Eileen.

I had a vision of a Suffolk threshing tackle trying to negotiate first the steep descent, then plunging through the rocky flood ; and I must say it seemed unlikely, even allowing for a smaller size.

'Any road, they charge two pounds for setting I've heard,' Rockfall said. That seemed to settle it.

Uncle Billy promised to find out about the thrasher. He was looking forward to the time of his life in his little mill.

Meanwhile we went 'brackening'. The importance of this harvest of the fells was impressed on me by Rockfall informing me that it took about an hour and a half to get to the fell where their bracken was. It was not their fell, he said, because, since their fell lay on the far side of the Beacon, it would have meant hauling the bracken all up the steep slope and over the Beacon home. He went every year and cut bracken on a fell which grew more bracken than its owner could use, a little farther away than their own fell, but this was more than compensated for by the fact that it was downhill to haul it.

'How many loads can you get in a day ?' I asked him.

'Naught but one,' he replied.

The need for it was further emphasized by the sight of the girls and George gathering up the leaves which were now falling from the trees, and filling sacks with them. When I went up to the farm at milking-time, I found the cows standing amid a litter of the scarlet and gold of autumn. The grey-and-white shippoon looked decorated as for a festival.

As Mrs. Rockfall sat there along with her husband and George, tugging at the full udders, a glance into a corner of the building recalled something to her mind.

' 'Tis last chance to apply for t'petrol coupons,' she said. 'Will you help me fill up t'form again ?'

This had to do with their water-supply, as much

of a problem to them within a few hundred yards of unlimited water—but vertical hundreds of yards—as to us in flat Suffolk. Mrs. Rockfall was always thinking about it. One morning she said to me : ‘I dreamt last night how I could get t’rain-water across yard into shippon.’ It was a fairly complicated pattern of pipes and levels : I never heard of such a logical dream. She already had her own little hot-water system running from the boiler beside the kitchen stove, through a cupboard, into her back-kitchen, or dairy. This was not infallible ; it had unaccountable moods : when you were sitting quietly by the fire there would be a sudden choking and hissing : the lid would fly off the boiler and boiling water and steam come rushing out. At a general shout Mrs. Rockfall would rush off into the back premises ; and in a minute all would be well again.

In case the rain-water supply should fail Mrs. Rockfall had bought an old motor engine to pump the water up from below for the shippon. All that was known about it was that the man who installed it had made it go, and it had pumped water on that occasion. Since then several members of the family had turned the handle without effect, and the expert had had to be called in. There had often been a shortage of rain-water even this summer ; and Mrs. Rockfall knew there would be at other times ; and rather than be short of water for dairying, she would try and master the working of a motor engine. Without doubt she would master it when she had time. It was necessary to have some more petrol, so the official form had to be filled up. This was the second time of doing it.

First we had to find the form, which meant turning out several drawers and finding several other documents of varying importance which had been considered lost. Then to find ink and pen. Then to make the pen write. After the nib had been uncrossed from its fall behind the sofa, and the bits of

rug extracted, and after a good deal of mental arithmetic and calls across the yard to Rockfall, the answer to the first question was agreed on—the acreage respectively of arable, pasture, and fell land. (We had difficulty in assessing under what head fell land came: ‘There’s a hundred acres.’ ‘Ninety-nine,’ shouted Rockfall.) Mrs. Rockfall boldly traced out the figures, but not a mark would the pen make. Another good rattle round the ink-pot produced a blot but nothing more. ‘Try it upside down,’ I suggested; a method I have resorted to in post offices. The nib wrote like that, but with a spluttering of inky dots. It was almost a complete farm inventory that the form required, including technical engineering details that left us all at a loss. ‘What did we put last time?’ That was it: if only we could remember: we were not even sure that we had got the acreage right. Then a number of dates were required. When was the last application made? Who could remember? Molly had a vague recollection she posted it on a market-day. I remembered then that it was just before I had returned to Suffolk for our corn harvest. ‘It must have been the end of July.’ Mrs. Rockfall applied pen to paper again. ‘T’end of July,’ she traced in the space for the answer to that question. We finished the sheet, only to discover that there were a lot more questions on the back.

The next morning it was an early milking, and an extra big breakfast in preparation for the long journey to the bracken fell. The cart axle was greased; rakes, ropes, forks, coats, a sack or two, and a great basket of provisions were loaded into it. Lastly George and Rockfall and I climbed in, and set off, casting anxious looks at the weather, the cart drumming on the stony track and beating a devil’s tattoo through every bone in one’s body, even making one’s teeth rattle. It was a wonderful relief when we came to the end of it, and were bowling softly over the sward of aftermath on Long

Field. So into the field of the 'seeds', where we stopped to mow a good bagful of clover for Willie, and on through Harvey's field of the young bull and into his yard. He was just coming out of his shippon. Rockfall reined in the horse, and there was the usual salute of silence between the brothers, after a muttered word or two, which I was getting used to. Then a sudden rush of staccato syllables between them, then a further full gaze and silence. They sounded like half-words: I could understand very little when brother spoke to brother. Suffolk speech is long, lingering, as though for the love of the song that the words make: but the fell farmer's talk is in little avalanches, like a fall of stones, followed by the arrested, mid-syllable silence in which mind seems to stare straight into mind.

It was something about a ram they were discussing. Sheep and rams were the topic of the hour. The roads now were thronged with fell farmers' flocks drawing down from the already wintry heights towards the market, where sheep sales were being held. Harvey was sending one or two rams to market: Rockfall had bespoken one of Joe's to which he had taken a fancy back in the harvest days. The conversation over, we climbed the steep track out of Harvey's yard.

Our journey continued over fields for a mile or two more, past Joe's, where in an outlying meadow a horse was grazing of which Rockfall said, 'There's something of Mettle in that horse', and through lanes whose hedges were heavy with fruit of rose and elder and rowan which swept close by our faces.

We came to a narrow granite road, and plodded along this till we rounded a bend of the hills and came upon a fell landscape that was new to me. We passed a farm-house at a corner, standing sideways as though to look along the road. It was neat, white-washed, with a stone yard between it and its shippon, a pond, a space of green, two stone sheep-folds, and a great sycamore on the green, whose shadow

was playing over those plain white surfaces. It symbolized for me the particular quality of these farmsteads, a beauty quite different from those of Suffolk, which have a flowery and fruiting tangle about them (almost the plaster-work is sporting those roses, and the leaf-carved beams bearing apples). These homesteads have an austere whiteness as of starched linen and kerchief and cap, a Quakerish quality.

This farm had struck me as typifying the fell-foot homes, when suddenly Rockfall turned to me, 'Yon's where mother came from: she was born in that house.' I looked at it with new interest, and at the land around it. There seemed a good deal of arable for these parts; the farm lay in a hollow. Over there a man was ploughing, finishing the headlands of a narrow corner, and slewing himself sideways from the hedge, to cut as much as possible of the land under it.

'Hedges want laying,' Rockfall said. 'You never saw them like that at one time of day.' To me they looked pretty orderly, but looking more closely I saw it was their past trimness that I was admiring. Old Mrs. Rockfall's generation had maintained such a stout structure that subsequent growth had not yet hidden it. Far beyond his mother's generation the care went back, as whole mature trees of ash and chestnut growing horizontally bore witness.

'Twas hard work here when she was a young girl. They grew a lot of corn and taties: there was always something to do. They were a large family: she went out to service when she was fourteen. Five pounds a year she got, and came home once in a twelvemonth.'

More than ever I wondered at the old lady's laughter and vitality.

Rockfall stopped to talk to the man ploughing. I noticed a wild rose blooming in the hedge long past its season; fitting that it should be by *her* home. The talk was again of sheep sales. The land interested me, the way the plough flung up stones that lay scattered over the surface. Rockfall had a shock to

learn that Joe's ram had gone through the sale the day before: the man he was talking to had been there. 'But I told him I'd have it.'

The man said, 'Well, it was there: didn't fetch what it should neither.' There had clearly been a misunderstanding. Rockfall scratched his head, and re-evoked the scene in the harvest field where he had bespoken the ram. It had not even made as much at the sale as he had said he would give. 'Might have saved himself t'trouble.' It was a puzzle. The farmer said, 'He forgot, likely; or didna' think you meant it for certain.' They fell into a silence of speculation, which was only broken by a word of parting, and Willie carried us on, Rockfall wondering where a suitable ram was now to be obtained. For he had watched that ram growing and had ear-marked it, mentally, for his flock.

We seemed to have been travelling a long time when Rockfall said, 'We're nearly there now.' He turned the cart in at a gate. We were at the foot of a fell that rose almost directly from the side of the road. A long sledge lay just inside the gate—Rockfall's sledge which he had carted here when he had come to cut the bracken a month back. We unloaded our things from the cart on to the sledge, hitched Willie to it, and began a twisting journey upwards. As we ascended the wind increased, and by the time we reached the bracken it was something more than a breeze. In contrast to its brisk coolness there was something soft and sleepy about the sunlight that hovered among the peaks and shadowy valleys. The ripe bracken tarnished the light: the high country looked very old yet inviolate, with humanity clinging to the skirts of the hills. It gave me an almost physical sense of cessation, hibernation, sleep. But that was by no means to be the mood of our day. A rake was being handed me. 'Tis Long Mardale you see yonder,' Rockfall said, seeing my gaze fixed on that distant valley. 'Where Uncle Billy has his mill, and his brother-in-law has the last farm.'

'The last farm ?'

'Ay, where t'road ends.'

'What's beyond ?'

'Just fells. Tower Farm : 'tis a famous place for blackberries. You can pick all day without walking fifty yards. We go over there in back-end for them.'

We set to work to rake up the bracken into swathes for forking on to the sledge. We had left Willie tethered to the sledge with his bag of clover to nose in. Bracken—brackens as they call them—are both light and stiff : as fast as we raked them in, the wind scattered them again. They went scampering away among the rocks. Sometimes a whole rolled-up swathe would begin bowling off down the hill. Did I say the wind was cool ? I soon followed Rockfall's example, and was in my shirt-sleeves. Raking round rocks, teasing the stuff out of little hollows, going splash into unexpected swamps, climbing down, climbing up again.

A piece of paper came blowing to me over the shoulder of the hill. I associated it with something. Next moment I knew what, and sweating as I was, flung down my rake and ran. I was just in time. Willie had edged himself round to our basket and found it more interesting than his bag. He had already had the two large slices of fruit-cake that Nora had wrapped up for me, and was dipping in his nose again.

'But for that piece of paper,' I said to Rockfall (it lay wind-flattened to a rock) ; 'we should have had no dinner to-day.' Rockfall looked up. It was the first time I had seen him look really scared. I told him what had happened ; then he took out his watch. 'We'd best have it now.' But the wind was having our bracken swathes all the time, bit by bit. 'Nay, we'd best get this sledge-load first, I dare say.' He took up his rake again to finish gathering. Before he began he turned to me. 'Are you sure you put basket out of his reach this time ?'

Loading a sledge with bracken in a high wind, one

forgets the majesty of the view. There was nothing to keep the stuff on the sledge but young George, who did his best to stand on every corner at once. We gave up both trying to fork it : I took my rake again and stood behind Rockfall, and as soon as he lifted a forkful, chased the third of it that scattered away.

At last we had a load : Rockfall called it enough ; and after a minute young George came gasping and struggling to the top of it. We roped it from back to front and side to side. 'Gee ! Willie' ; and away we went with it sliding and sidling down the fell. It looked like some shaggy, sleepy, primitive beast. At the bottom we pushed it off the sledge in a heap against the wall, and sank down in it and undid our dinner.

Again there was the view. That deep dark cleft between the fells over there : one saw it from Brant Farm as we saw it from here : it looked no nearer, no farther ; yet we had come several miles. All the time I had worked in the fields this summer I had found my eyes drawn to Long Mardale when we rested. It went curving away mysteriously, and ended, Rockfall had said, in a stony track rising over the fells. There were two villages, a mill, and farms all along it ; yet from here it looked as narrow as the valley of our own Beck Mill. Though I had never been in Westmorland before, I had been too busy on the farm here during my visits to see any more of it than was visible on the journey to the market town. But I had made a resolve to explore Long Mardale before returning to Suffolk for good.

As we ate our dinner Rockfall told me of the tower from which Tower Farm had taken its name, a structure with walls eight feet thick, wherein were slits from which their ancestors had shot arrows at the Picts and Scots coming down out of the fells from the north.

After dinner, we returned upwards with the sledge and got another load of bracken. There were two

other people getting bracken now. They, too, had a sledge : it was impossible to bring a cart up here. We had not quite enough mown for a load ; so Rockfall took his scythe and mowed the only available patch left, rather sparse and rocky, while George and I raked it in. He had some more mown, but that was on the other side of the fell, for another day. ' 'Tis a weary job mowing among rocks,' he said : it certainly took us a long time to get the rest of that load.

Returning to our cart, we had another snack, then set to work to load it. The two sledge-loads made one cart-load. Rockfall loaded : George and I forked. Suddenly, as he leaned to embrace my forkful, he drew back with a sharp exclamation and held his arm. My fork had been further into the bunch than he had thought, or we mistimed our movements, he leaning over before I had done thrusting up : he had received his stab, Luckily it was not much : but I had drawn the blood of a man of Westmorland.

Before starting to load the cart Rockfall had held up the basket and said, 'Sure you don't want any more to eat or drink ?' had a last swig of tea himself, and laid it at the bottom of the load. The coats also. We looked at the sky : there would be no getting at them again until we unloaded. Well, we would all be wet or none : in they went.

It was a tall load : it needed to be, for our whole day's work. We strained on the ropes, made them fast, and then started for home. Rockfall led Willie ; George and I put our forks on our shoulders and fell in behind. I thought the long tramp home would be wearisome after the hard work, but it was almost effortless to walk on level ground again, and we got into a swing with Willie's plod and the nodding of the load and the clacking of the wheels, till I hardly knew which was me and which was the cart, through whose back-iron my hand could feel the tug of Willie's muscle and the resistance of the granite under the wheel. The compact and ruddy bracken reared

above : we alone knew what it had cost to catch all that and fasten it there. Hitherto I had regarded bracken as something to be exterminated by all good husbandmen, not as a thing to go miles after, and labour to harvest. The evening sky was like a seascape, breaking into icy-clear clouds over the distance, after a misty and musing day. I fell into a wide-eyed doze of walking, foot to foot with Rockfall, George, Willie, and the spokes of the wheel coming over endlessly. I did not think how utterly uneconomic this was, going miles after a load of bracken, spending the whole day getting it, as I may have thought later amid the abundant straw-litter of Suffolk. Rather I was immersed in the life of Westmorland, and this was part of it. There is an influence of eternity about the fells which permeates the valleys too, so that walking as I this evening with this load, such a phrase as 'out-of-date' loses its meaning. There was the wild rose in the hedge again, and Rockfall's mother's Quaker-like home : I saluted both in the same glance. I had perhaps been hypnotized by the hills and their labour : if so, all here were under that spell, whose rule of 'the longest way round is the shortest way home' was implicit in the landscape, and governed every act.

We passed the farmer's finished ploughing, and his solitary motionless plough. We passed a field where they had been all day lifting big clean-shining potatoes. Farther on, Rockfall halted Willie. There was his brother Joe fetching up his cows from a roadside field. I moved forward to learn the cause of the misunderstanding about the ram ; but Rockfall spoke of quite a number of things about the day and the work of the season, till I thought he was not going to mention the ram at all. As he stood by Willie's head I saw a native something they had in common. There was something in the length and strength of head, and even the feet had an affinity, the clog with its steel rim round the sole, and the hoof with its shoe, both road-polished.

At last he came to it. It was fragmentary to my understanding. '... heard you ... ram in t'safe ... said I'd ... didna' you remember?'

'Oh ay; I remember you said something about it, but I didna' take it you wanted him for sure. Thought you'd have ... didna' want to hold you to anything. Thought you might have seen one suited you better somewhere ... oh, I'm sorry.' There they stood, brought to a staring silence, bogged in the explanation.

'Nay, nay,' Joe broke out suddenly in a high voice (I had hardly caught Rockfall's beginning of a sentence it interrupted); 'the price was all right: I shouldna' have wished for more. ...' Further silence, eye to eye. Then Rockfall led the talk away into market matters generally; and so we started to continue on our road, and Joe to collect his cows again.

When we reached Beck Mill we found the load was just too tall to pass under the bridge which carried the little mill-stream across, to pour upon the top of the wheel into the beck. This bridge always set a limit to loads passing that way. By jumping on the bracken we managed to compress it just enough to let it under. Some we unloaded in the mill loft and took the rest up to the farm. Mrs. Rockfall had a hot rabbit-pie for us, with plenty of bacon and gravy.

We spent several days journeying to and fro after bracken; not consecutive days, for the weather was not fine for more than a day or two at a time. But in little over a week we had carried about six good loads. That was the winter's bedding; for of course they would not use valuable oat-straw for that. Rockfall said he would get more if there was an opportunity, but there was so much to be done now, that he saw little prospect of it. There were potatoes to lift and clamp, turnips to cart, manure to cart and spread—and finally, the great labour of the ploughing.

But there was more than just labour. There was entertainment, accounting for the unusual sight one

day of Mrs. Rockfall mounting the hill to the village carrying a miniature tree in a pot adorned with coloured wax flowers. Eileen was not far behind carrying an ornamental cake. And soon the village hall was filled with other such bright things, brought by many people. It was going to be a long night, beginning with a concert, with a whist drive and dance to follow. For some time lately I had noticed one or other of the girls sitting absorbed by the fire with a book, mouthing silently. I had seen the book on the table while pastry was being rolled out, or held in the hand that was not turning the separator. They were doing a playlet for the concert. Molly followed Eileen up to the hall with a suitcase, containing among other properties, John Rockfall's best suit for the play. John Rockfall sat at home in his shirt-sleeves, well content to have such a valid reason for not turning out after dark. Molly was so tall that her father's suit just about fitted her.

Fellside enjoyed a considerable amount of merry-making for so lonely a spot, for it had a good hall. It was no converted army hut of the last war, but a building of stone standing high and by itself, the stones of which the farmers had carted from their farms to the site in the year of the coronation of King Edward the Seventh. It had been erected to mark that event. It will stand as long as any building in Fellside. It was a beacon of sociability for miles in that lonely land. People rode and walked over hill and valley to it. Anything that was to be 'held', was held in Fellside's hall. Like the country trades of the village, it knit the region.

As we walked up from the mill that night, we called at the Ransom's for their niece, who had been looking after the house since Mrs. Ransom's illness. She was always busy, had a way of taking busy-ness in her stride, so we had to wait a few minutes while she finished some last job and put her coat and hat on. The two old people sat on either side of the fire, a cat between them. From my remarking about some

photograph on the wall—a Kentish scene—it appeared that old Ransom had been a great cricketer. He leaned back, expanded about his young days in Kent on a big estate—the wonderful, never-to-be-forgotten cricket matches between villages. He leaped forward again in his chair enacting his exploits. That tremendous catch. There was the ball—we followed his gaze up among the oatcakes under the ceiling; but he was looking much, much higher, as he got up and stood, waiting for it, hands cupped. We all waited—that ball had been skyed by their opponents' crack batsman, thoroughly set. And then he caught it—so! 'How they cheered,' he cried; we nearly did too. He was beaming. But the niece came in: we were all ready. The old man did not want to stop talking about the cricket, but we were moving out through the door. I was last; he still held my eye. It was a difficult departure.

We walked up the hill in the dark, bustling along rather, at thought of the entertainment. Mrs. Rockfall and the girls kept asking and reassuring one another about many accessories necessary for their make-up, from trousers to burnt cork. Molly in addition had a poem to recite. The poet was Mrs. Rockfall: she still had surprises for me. It was about a lost umbrella. 'Nay, 'tis nothing but a lot of foolishness,' she insisted, deprecating my interest. 'Just that one day, after church, someone went off with my good umbrella and left an old one in place of it. I felt that mad, but afterwards I thought, "what's t'good?", and laughed, and made up a rhyme when I got to bed that night, about someone coming to church looking holy, and then going off with another body's umbrella. I often think of things in bed.'

We had reached the village hall, as was indicated by the sound of many feet besides our own; but it was too dark to see anybody, though the Rockfall girls could distinguish voices and sent greetings through the blackness to this and that name, which

were laughingly returned. A dim figure in front of me pushed aside a curtain, and I was in the hall, and light sprang upon the colourful features of Mr. Boldrigg, who was before me. He took the money at the door. (He was, I felt, the doorkeeper of Fellside, the very impersonation of the place in its character of home. To hear, passing his little house, the piano jingling a hymn-tune, with the wild scenery all round, was to have a sense of that.)

The schoolmaster was busy between the stage and the auditorium, coming and going through the curtain.

Here was another local patriot: I do not know why he has not appeared in these pages before. I first met him on a summer evening, standing outside his school-house gate, staring towards the Beacon. He was quite the opposite of Mr. Boldrigg—spare and pale, but with a lively interest in his eyes when they left their pensive observation of the fells to answer my remark of greeting. He did his best to preserve all that was expressive of the place he loved. His father had been editor of the local paper, and that was no mere hack-work. I understood in his descriptions of those former days that it was a creative job, a traditional memory brought to bear upon events of the moment, scholarship concerned with the local and the actual, with its groundwork of agriculture. His father's comments on events of note, as he had sat in the inn, were still forcefully recounted, as might be the judgments of a Dr. Johnson. The schoolmaster, his son, was concerned to preserve as far as possible the local dialect. He encouraged it in his pupils, trying to disentangle it from urban slang. Local words were to him a treasury, expressing something for which there was no equivalent in the language, being compounded of local conditions; and he could trace them back to early English origins. A great sweep of time, like a wind-cloud, was the mould of his thought; and he stood often among the phloxes of his garden, staring

at the Beacon about sunset, to gauge to-morrow's weather.

The people came briskly into the hall, which soon filled up. The young farmers looked well in their dark best suits, and strode with echoing feet down the hall. They are a people without shyness, simple and decisive; they are not abashed, but ask the visitor in among them as he finds them. This I felt is the condition of those who have never been dispossessed of land. However small their holdings, they are masters of them, and independent in their dealings, and unafraid.

The people sang old border songs, intermingled with modern ones, to the conducting of the schoolmaster, who looked as though he were blessing the assembly. The sketch in which the Rockfall girls took part went off excellently; Mr. Rockfall's best suit and the burnt cork (or was it soot?) made a perfect disguise. There was a duologue too, which the schoolmaster had sponsored, entirely in local idiom—just to show what Westmorland dialect could do. It was to ordinary English as cream to milk—sound and sense both richly allusive. Had I been able to understand more of it, it would have been a feast to me: as it was, it was a sort of spoken music. Then came the delivery of Mrs. Rockfall's poem. This gave great delight—it was rich also in the allusive dialect—because obviously somebody local, though unknown, was the butt of it. It really was the best possible way in which she could have taken her revenge. Mrs. Rockfall appeared dissatisfied though, in the midst of the clapping, as Molly bowed, 'Silly girl went and left out a great bit.'

When the concert was over, and the elders began to depart; the young farmers then cleared the hall of benches, ready for the dance that was to follow.

'A good company,' said Harvey, who had walked across the fields, as he passed me, going out.

With a piano and a violin for music, the dance was soon under way. The young farmers ranged them-

selves opposite the girls and danced square dances, then took partners for modern ones. But mostly the Lancers, Sir Roger de Coverley, with occasional polka and barn-dance, were the dances they danced on these occasions. Except when a real modern dance band came out from Kendal. Then they danced fox-trots. As though the playing of a fox-trot were a mystery only to be grasped by saxophonists.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Now we had reached 't'back-end', a phrase to which I never shall take kindly for autumn. The heights of Long Mardale were red with bracken. One day we set out for Tower Farm, at the end of that deep valley, the famous place for blackberries. I had got my old car to go again. It had been housed up here all summer : I had been to and fro by train. My last reserve of pre-ration petrol was saved for its final return journey. That was soon to be ; the harvests were over here, and I should go back to our own home for the winter, leaving the family at Beck Mill. But there was enough to take us to Long Mardale—Nora, Anthea, me, and the Rockfalls, while Nora's mother minded the twins. But the car was so old now it would hardly climb the hills. We were a big load—people and blackberrying baskets.

When I reached the valley I found it much more populous than I had imagined—there were water mills and farms. And such farms—neat, small, and white, under the steep fell, sheltered by trees—snug was the word for them. They became fewer, farther between, as the valley narrowed, till at last we came to the end—Tower Farm. There was the tower, not so very tall, but stout, and with narrow slits through which the bowmen had shot, and along beside it a stone barn looking as solid as itself. At an open door half-way up the side of this building three men stood

looking out. 'We thought you were thresher,' said one, as we stopped and greeted one another with the Westmorland gaze. Such was the state of the car.

'You expecting it?'

'Since yesterday.' I gathered they had not been standing there all that time.

They were divided between disappointment that we were not the thresher, and pleasure at seeing their relations, the Rockfalls—a reunion that occurred only once a year, at blackberry time, apart from moments at market.

The farmer, a little lively man, was particularly glad to see Rockfall himself among our party. So, while the others went off to pick blackberries, we set out to see some heifers of which he wanted Rockfall's opinion. I understood they were in some near-by field, from the way the man alluded to them as 'just up yonder'. He led us round by the back of the farm-house, where a stream gushed past the kitchen door. The wife had only to step out on to the flagstone and dip her kettle to have it instantly filled with sparkling mountain water.

We began to climb: we went on climbing. We came to a gate, and went through it. We ceased to walk: we began to scramble. Our host plunged upwards, waving his stick encouragingly—'they're just yonder'—and never stopped talking. I was dumb, breathless. Even Rockfall I noticed seemed to be labouring; his starched visiting-collar looked too tight for him, and he interrupted the other's avalanche of words less and less.

'You'll cart with sledge here,' Rockfall suggested, as we paused on a more level spot, as might be to admire the view. But the farmer was eager for us to see the heifers.

'Ay—runs down almost of itself.' I could well believe it. After all this circuitous climbing we were now directly above the farm-house; far, far above. It was an awe-inspiring place. That man should have had the temerity to settle himself in this deep cleft,

and call the mountain his. And defend himself here against storm and famine, and the wild men from the north. Those who had lived in Tower Farm had taken the first shock of invasion.

At last we came to the summit. 'Thought we should have found them afore this,' the farmer said. There were the heifers, feeding outlined against the sky.

Rockfall looked around him and discovered a new use for aircraft. 'Drop slag and lime on here and 'twould make a good pasture of it.'

We approached the heifers, looked at them for about five minutes, talked about them for another five, and prepared to return.

'Do you often come and see them?' I asked, surprised at our short stay.

'Oh ay : I've been up here once to-day already,' the farmer said. It was just the equivalent of our Suffolk farmer's 'walk round'. The fell farmer made nothing of the fact that it was mostly perpendicular. The chief object of our viewing the heifers had been to see one which Rockfall had sold him a year or so ago as a calf. 'There, 'tis that white-feäced un'—the farmer pointed her out. When Rockfall spoke to me I could now understand him, and though he seemed to be speaking in his ordinary way, he must have been speaking (for him) quite slowly and carefully ; because now, when he and the other farmer began discussing the heifers I could hardly understand a word. A torrent of technicalities poured from each in turn, sometimes from both together. 'White-feäced 'un—good bagged 'un' were about all I could make out. I was rather disappointed to feel that I did not understand Westmorland lingo, just when I was beginning to think that I did. Listening to them—they seemed to be talking at twice the speed of our schoolmaster's dialect sketch—I knew that I never should. The most puzzling thing is that both *ō* and *ā* are reduced to the same sound : 'stēāns' equals stones, and 'fēāce' equals face—so where are you ?

We were about half-way down, when we beheld the thresher moving slowly along the road towards the farm far below. This immensely excited our host, and we went skidding down the slope in an endeavour to keep up with him. The way here lay among small beech and birch trees, and I went bumping from one to another, and was thankful to be caught at last by the gate, just as the farmer was about to open it.

Now, on more level ground, I had breath, as we hurried along, to ask him about his corn. Any field here which was level enough to plough must have been in shadow from the fell for at least half the day. Noon, when the sun shone full along the valley in the short days, must have been the curious glory of winter. Often, for days on end, a ceiling of cloud lay over them between the walls of the fells. Yet he had grown oats here : last year an acre, this year two. Last year he had had to feed them green to his cows : this year they had really ripened. That was why all this wonder and expectancy of the thresher. In this outpost of men, where tenaciously the humane art of husbandry had persisted beside the wilderness, corn had ripened. We had reached the barn. There, the rare sun was in that barn ; it was stacked with sheaves.

Now the thresher came clattering into the stony yard, drawn by a tractor, and did what looked like a ceremonial circuit of the great sycamore standing in the middle of it, and drew up before the open barn doors. Behind the thresher (I was pleased to see the name of a Suffolk firm on it) was a buncher, not an elevator, for of course the straw was much too precious to stack : it must be carried, bunch by bunch, into the barn. Everybody came running to look : the wife and daughter stood in the white-washed porch. The pig stood up on his hind-legs looking over the wall of his sty. Such an ordinary sight to me, the threshing-tackle, yet seeing it beside the great tower, I realized that nothing so extraordinary, so essentially other and foreign, had come

into this yard since the wild tribesmen from the north, with their blood-curdling din. Yes, it was an invasion, and a noisy one, and I had for a minute (seeing it as they saw it) a sort of sixth-sense impression of what it involved. The grim old tower seemed to be in a tussle with the ingenious new machine.

Now the lonely farm became full of people; of neighbours, who had seen the thresher pass. Only the two mechanics in blue overalls were not loudly talking. Quite silently, efficiently, they backed and wheeled the outfit about, till it was in position. The farmer kept running to and fro, saying things to the mechanics which apparently needed no answer; then into his barn, then into another building. He looked at the sheaves; he looked at the bins he had constructed to hold the corn.

'There'll be fifteen sacks,' he suggested to me. 'Two acres—but there was a green bit in corner we fed to cows—there'll be twenty sacks, likely.'

'Yes, you might get twenty sacks,' I agreed. Just then I saw the rest of our blackberrying party come into the yard with loaded baskets. I followed them into the house, for it had just started to rain. But the farmer had prepared for that. From the living-room window I saw him rigging up a tarpaulin between threshing machine and tractor, to keep the driving belt dry.

The room in which I stood was dim with the dark day. Its fire shone into it: it was a glowing shrine of bread. Loaves had lately been taken, and buns were now being taken, from the oven by the wife kneeling to the stove. The loaves stood in a row before the hearth bathed in the glow. There was a long table under the window which was laid with as many places as it had room for. Any number of people seemed to be expected. The kitchens of all the best Westmorland farms have this hospitable, expectant air, full of the odours of baking and the visible signs of it. The daughter was

taking off Anthea's wet hat and coat, and Anthea, never shy, was loudly telling her of all the things she had enjoyed that day. The baskets full of blackberries were laid in a corner. There was already a visitor here before us—a man on some farming business, to judge from his conversation with the wife. He was settled to his tea, because he had said he must be getting along, and of course would not insult the house by not eating under its roof. But when the thrasher appeared he rather changed his mind. Next moment the door burst open and the farmer himself ran in, followed by a seemingly endless stream of people, among whom I noticed the mechanics in their blue. They wasted no time in gossip or salutation, but went straight to the table, sat down around it with a clatter of clogs on the flags, and with just enough room between each of them to allow of free movement of the right arm. I have never seen anything more business-like than the unanimous way the dozen or more hands were put forth to the food on the table. The wife was ready with the tea-pot, and went round and round. In a matter of minutes, it seemed, everything on the table was cleared, and they all jumped up together: there was another great clatter of clogs; and next moment the room was empty save for us. I do not think anyone had spoken a word, except the farmer: they were too busy eating. They ran to the threshing outfit, and in a minute the fly-wheel revolved, and the thing was pouring out corn and bunched straw.

We sat down to our tea. The visitor, who had been looking out of the window, said, 'Well, I'll go and give a hand,' and off he went, in his gentlemanly suit, and disappeared into the barn.

We were all interested in the threshing, and were gazing out of the window. A small voice said, 'Mummy!' I turned, and saw Anthea looking uncertainly into a large cup of black tea before her. 'I usually start with a drink of milk,' she said politely to our hostess.

After tea I went to see the threshing. The farmer was hurrying to and fro with the sacks of oats, emptying them into his bins. 'How they come,' he cried. 'There'll be thirty sacks.' Friends and neighbours were all busy in the barn: it was a sort of frolic. The gentlemanly visitor had his coat off, and was carrying bundles of straw. Then Nora called me in to show me the dairy. It was a vaulted room at the base of the tower: its walls were arched to bear the weight of the eight-feet thick walls of the edifice. The whole was white-washed. It was a cloister of milk and butter.

I had least expected to find such grace under that rough building. The whole art of dairying had a peculiar beauty with the mountain water rushing by the back door.

The pig was up on his hind-legs to see us off. Mrs. Rockfall said to her husband, 'Why don't you get a pig? We'll soon have done bacon we've got, from t'pig we killed in spring. 'T didn't keep well.'

''Tis wrong time to kill a pig, is spring,' Rockfall answered.

'Well, get a grown one then, and kill it for Christmas.'

'Maybe,' he conceded.

'I know where there is a pig,' the farmer's wife put in. 'They've two, and only want one to kill.'

It amused me to hear substantial farmers of Westmorland saying they knew where there was a pig, I having just heard from my sister whose husband, in Suffolk, had five hundred. But in Westmorland the pig is not a trade but a household commodity, as the cow used to be in our arable country. A farm of four hundred acres would have four or five cows, as did the farm I went to as a pupil in 1920. Now milk churns stand at every gate in Suffolk, as in Westmorland.

'There'll be forty sacks,' the farmer cried, as he bid us good-bye.

'He's done well,' I said, as we drove away, 'if he's grown twenty sacks of oats to the acre here.'

I saw in the mirror a smile on Mrs. Rockfall's face. 'Ted's hopes run on ahead,' she said.

On October the fifth the thresher came to Brant Farm. Every neighbouring farmer had sent either one of his sons or come himself. The thresher was set opposite Rockfall's little dutch barn, or rather they were trying to get it set there. A threshing machine, of course, to work properly, must stand absolutely level, and the men had the best equipment of jacks and blocks that I have ever seen. Even so, it was an awkward business: there was hardly room to get round the machine, the bank rose so steeply on the other side. Beside the dutch barn stood (still stood) the pyramidal stack, but too far from the threshing drum to be forked on to it when the sheaves in the dutch barn should be finished. Would they have to go through all this jacking up of the thresher again?

It was a cool blowy morning, after a night of rain. We saw the stream-lined Scottish train pass up the valley with its plume of smoke, quite silent to us here. I still think with wonder, remembering those disastrous days, of how regularly the trains passed to and fro along the valley. They seemed to belie the news of defeat, dislocation, and death, which the group beside the threshing drum were discussing while they waited.

There were two tractors: it needed two to get the threshing drum to Brant Farm. The drum was fixed: everything was ready. Harvey, Joe, old Mr. Ransom, George, I, and others whom I did not know, went to our places. I, by chance, had the honour of pitching the first sheaf upon the drum. What a familiar movement, followed by the tearing grunt of the machine as it went through! How strange though, to be doing it here among the rocks and the fells. Rockfall was with me on the stack—or mow, properly speaking. The sheaves went through at a surprising rate for the size of the drum, and being hand-made ('I'm one for making o'er-big sheaves') were heavy.

But we had not been working long—it did not seem long—before there came a stoppage. I wondered what was the matter. Looking slant-wise out of the dutch barn I saw cakes, pasties, buns, and cups of tea, enough for a school-treat, set out in the hay-barn. I looked at my watch: ten o'clock; our 'drinking'. For the amount of food and drink consumed I must say there was amazingly little waste of time. Mrs. Rockfall and the girls served: there was no polite hanging back; everyone knew what he wanted and went straight for it. In Suffolk the fly-wheel of labour, so to speak, is a much weightier affair: it takes longer to start and stop. It is a case of stretching the body slowly upright, looking up at the sky, looking down at the watch, 'Oh—ah—well, I reckon that'll be about dinner-time. What think you? Well, we'd best be getting arter it, bor.'

At eleven o'clock the girls came round with bottles of lemonade. This did not necessitate stopping the machinery, as the others were more adept at drinking fizzy out of a bottle than I am. At twelve o'clock we all hurried into the kitchen for dinner. Mrs. Rockfall served it from a big black cauldron hanging by a chain over the fire. We were a lively crowd: the youngsters sat in a row on the couch against the window, continually ragging each other, especially one small, bright, dark-eyed lad named Peter. Occasionally one of the elders joined in. Peter seemed to be held in esteem and affection by them all. Later Mrs. Rockfall told me he was one of the best farm lads of the neighbourhood.

There was no 'dinner hour'. We were all farmers and farmers' sons, and the moment dinner was over, we were up and out in a body. Not that there was anything sketchy about the eating. I have never seen plates cleaned so methodically and completely. After the last forkfuls, pieces of bread made little careful journeys all round, and there was hardly a smear left.

'The young 'uns,' Mrs. Rockfall said, as their boisterous party went out: 'They love to get to-

gether : 'tis as good as a holiday to them. They'd have to work anyhow.'

I made no answer : my mouth was too full. I was last out as it was. I was ashamed of my plate.

We were nearing the bottom of the sheaves in the dutch barn : there remained the pyramidal stack. Would they move the drum to it ? If so, we should hardly get a fresh start before nightfall. Rockfall left me : George took his place, forking beside me. Suddenly there was a rattling din above my head, and there was Rockfall removing part of the roof. Through the hole I could see Joe standing on top of the little stack. I was kept busy pitching up the sheaves : it was a stretch up to the drum, and I could only see what was going on above my head at moments. Rockfall had disappeared : there was the sky, and Joe statuesque on the stack. Next minute a sheaf came crackling through upon my head, followed by another and another. To pitch one sheaf while two others are falling on you makes hard work of it. Joe had only to fling them downwards, so could pitch two to our one up to the drum. But it was not all easy going for him, the stack was so narrow at the top that he was frequently standing on a sheaf that bound in the others, and as he heaved and shifted from one foot to the other the stack swayed dangerously. Later, as he achieved more room and freedom, I became almost buried in sheaves, and my hat was more often off than on, and hardly escaped being pitched into the drum along with them. Sometimes Joe, as his pile sank, made a bad shot and the sheaf stuck half-way through the hole in the roof, to be joined by others. Then I had to get up on to the platform of sheaves we had left under the hole, and try to drag them through with my fork. It was not an ideal method of getting sheaves to the drum. We worked like Trojans to keep the machine fed, Joe, Rockfall, and myself. For so small a machine it took in sheaves at a rate I resented just then. I thought of things my farmer

friend of Suffolk, Mr. Colville, had on occasion said about threshing and threshers: 'They blunder the sheaves through too fast—hark—when you hear the drum give a grunt like that, it means the man has let the sheaf go through all in a lump, instead of spreading it, and there'll be corn left in the straw.' He used to keep a sharp eye on the straw as it came from the drum, to see that it had been threshed clean, because the threshing men were paid by the amount done, and naturally wanted to get as much through as possible in a day.

I felt sure the sheaves were going through this small machine too fast: hard as we worked the drum platform was nearly always empty. But one could not stop and discuss the matter with Rockfall; there was no time to do anything but keep one's own muscular machinery at work, and pray that Joe's aim would be true. As the afternoon drew on, the lemonade bottles went round again. It was very hot and dusty in the little dutch barn. First Joe's body, then his head disappeared from our view, till at last only his fork could be seen, swinging up with a sheaf on it. The aim deteriorated: there were more frequent blockages. Finally we abandoned the route via the roof altogether, and came outside to Joe. This was a relief, the wind blowing on us, and the dustless air made work seem easy. But the sheaves still had a fairly complicated journey. I stood opposite Joe, who now flung them over the tractor belt, or under it, or through it, occasionally on to it, and I caught them and passed them along to Rockfall, who pitched them up on to the drum over the head of the man bagging the corn.

So the threshing was done. The last sheaf went up: the wheels ceased to turn; had hardly ceased turning before everyone was in the house sitting down to tea: half-past three. The biggest pasty I have ever seen was on the table—apple and plum. The men wasted no time about getting the tackle away. By a few skilful manœuvres they extricated

it from a position that would have been a Suffolk steam-tackle driver's nightmare, and were soon descending the steep hill, and passing over the pack-bridge which humped the procession like a caterpillar. The boys stayed around a while, in a mood for games, but milking-time was at hand, and away they had to go to their several farms and cows.

We were busy after the threshing : we fetched the cart out, and every bit of chaff was gathered up, every wisp of straw. Nothing that had any food-value for stock would be wasted. In a lean-to beside the hay-barn, which had been converted into a granary, were the oats, a hundred sacks of them shot in a pile. Sheets of tin had been formed into bins and elaborately arranged at such angles as to baffle rats, tin was put round posts so that they should not climb up and fall upon the corn from above. How long, I wondered, would Fellside rats be thwarted of such a feast ?

'Tran quicker from drum than I could cart it away,' Rockfall said, rubbing his shoulders, as we stood looking at the heap, and Eileen at the rat obstructions. It was a good sight ; for now it was starting to rain and to blow, and winter was at hand.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Mr. Ransom had ordered the thresher too, but though his farmstead was close to Brant Farm as the crow flies, it was a long way as the thresher crawled. Distance had little relation to accessibility here. There were several other farms to be passed, each one of which also had bespoken the thresher. Mr. Ransom had two neat little stacks, quite different from the Rockfalls', in fact they were the neatest, most symmetrical stacks I have ever seen, miniatures, trim as toys. I think his youthful days in Kent

had something to do with this. Even so, to make such small stacks stand so true, up in the wind and on not very level ground, was a feat. He had thatched them, and clipped the thatch, and weighted the eaves with stones hung on ropes. He was proud of them, I could see, when I commented on them.

He had a keen sense of humour, but not much on which to exercise it there, poor old man, with his ailing wife. The labour of harvests—hay, corn, bracken—grew no less, though strength ebbed from his and her bones. But the stack at the mill which fell first into the beck, and then across the lane, gave him many a laugh. We all laughed about it afterwards, though it seemed a major disaster at the time. He re-enacted the scene to his wife, who had been confined to the house for a long time. But now, as the threshing-day approached she professed she was better. The niece had had a sudden call elsewhere: the brother for whom she usually kept house had broken his leg.

Mrs. Ransom got up and got out, and one day I saw her waiting for the bus by the milk-stand with a big basket on her arm, one which, if full, would be much too heavy for her to carry. She was going into town to get provisions for the threshing-feast. She had always kept a hospitable table, but now two things were against her—rationing, and the fact that owing to her illness, the great resource of the home-killed pig was lacking. She had not been able to cope with it, nor with the making of cheeses. She stood there in the cold October wind, with her big basket, determined to do the best she could. I heard some of the details of that shopping day; not all, but enough for imagination to picture the little figure squeezing in and out of shops, hurrying hither and thither. Exhausted, but not entirely baffled, she had returned with the basket tolerably full. For the rest, neighbours, hearing of her expedition, were quick to make up what was lacking. Chiefly fat, chiefly lard. For

the baking, the truly immense baking, that the feeding of that pasty-eating throng entailed, was heavy on fat.

It was done in time, not only the procuring, but the preparing and the cooking, by her, single-handed. On the day when the threshers were due to come, the table was spread, and there she waited. Mrs. Ransom in the house; her husband, with a nephew from a neighbouring farm who had come to lend a hand, stood outside the shippon. Robbie was here too, ready the moment the thresher was sighted, to jump on his bicycle and speed to the neighbours with the news. He was the only person I have known who *could* speed on a bicycle on those hills. He would go flying up them as though he had a gale behind him.

There was in this waiting a feeling different from the waiting for the threshing tackle at home, where it has become a part of the landscape. As I stared at the date 1712 cut in the stone of the house, I realized that there had never been a threshing machine on this farm before, not in old Ransom's life nor in the lives of those before him. But one would come to-day, that had been the message.

'Twas a terrible red sky this morning,' Mr. Ransom said. 'Tmeant a storm. I wish thresher'd come and we could get started. Hark!'

We all listened, but there was only the wind, blowing a little stronger, and cold.

The nephew was asking me about the arable farming of Suffolk. I was telling him of the between-war years, when farming went down and down, and the land and buildings became more and more dilapidated.

'But,' said the nephew, 'if we can make a living out of farming here, surely you could there?'

The unconscious reflection on the different standards of what comprised a 'living', struck me in his remark. But I pointed out to him the difference between farming that was a large-scale business and that which was a small-scale way of life; and how in the case of

the former, the actual living was quite a small item between the sums of money paid in and out.

Robbie gazed along the road, shifting from one foot to the other. Never had they stood and done nothing like this : it was worse than work, his attitude said. We moved round to the other side of the shippon, out of the wind, where the two stacks were. The barn doors stood wide open, and the granary was swept and ready.

I went into the kitchen. Old Mrs. Ransom hovered there, frail and bird-like. Like an old bird, but somehow magically young when she smiled, not having heard quite what I said, cocking her head. Her larder was full, the plates ready, the kettle on. What a baking it had been !

Mrs. Ransom went with small steps to the end window, and looked out upon the intricately detailed landscape for sign of the thrasher. Seeing nothing of it, her eyes wandered at last up the far slope of the fells, to the top of the Beacon. She remembered, she said to me, how she had gone with her husband when young, driving the sheep, and had climbed to the summit and stood gazing at the shining of the sea in the distance.

She sat down suddenly and bent a little forward, spent with the energy she had put into speaking of that time. Her breath came with difficulty. 'Would you open t'window?' she asked. I did so : the cold wind poured in. If only she could have had a dozen breaths from the Beacon ; the wind of youth.

'That's better.' She straightened ; stood up again. 'Sometimes it feels to me as though there's not enough air in the world,' she said as she closed the window. 'Tis all right ; 'twas only for a moment,' she reassured me.

'I wish thrasher would come ; he's set such store by it coming.'

Yes, that was old Ransom. Old but always eager to try something fresh. Grey and angular,

like one of the big stones of his shippon come to life, part of the place, immortal-looking. Only a month back he had sown an acre of wheat on his upland field, in the hope that it might ripen, as the oats had done. And he had built a little silo and carted load upon load of heavy aftermath and pressed into it, stamping slowly round and round, day after day, as on a miniature watch-tower. 'Mr. Ransom's birthday cake,' they called it.

And now the threshing machine—to hear the hum of it between these old walls, its breezy murmur displacing the ages-old thump-thump of the flail; a new note intervening between wind and stone. Only in the shadowy hill-recesses to which they had come many years ago was the silence still intact, and the spell of the past unbroken by the voice of the machine. Yet I felt there was something in his wife that feared to break that silence, as she stood listening, bird-like, with almost a little bird-alarm in her bright eyes. Though she looked for the coming of the thresher for her husband's sake, yet her look said, 'Let somebody young, who shall come after us break this silence; with his clever fingers and soft muscles, making the iron work for him. We have lived our time with the silence, and with labour.' But her husband was envious of the new age.

Old Ransom and Robbie were in the barn now, standing looking at the stacked hay on one side and the stacked corn on the other.

'It's been a good threshing floor,' the old man was saying, as I came out to them. He stood and stamped on the boards so that the wood rang. 'Tis sound as a nut yet. Eh, but thresher'll do days of our work in as many hours.'

'Nobbut it's been a good stand-by and all, threshing in t'barn,' Robbie said; 'Days when 'twas too wild to work outside.'

'Twill be too wild to work to-day, if 't don't soon come,' Mr. Ransom exclaimed, and went round into the wind and stared across the country.

'There,' he cried, vexed, 't'is starting to rain. I knew 'twould.'

The wind whisked wisps of hay about the old threshing floor. A low soft moo came from the cows in the shippin, as though they had smelt the rain.

'Ah, well, 'twill be tea-time presently.' The old man spoke the words with deep disappointment that the thresher had not come. There could be no threshing to-day now. We went slowly towards the house. 'Best close barn doors,' he told Robbie over his shoulder.

Mrs. Ransom still hovered in a suspended state by the table, which was set with a feast of home-made bread, cakes, and pasties. We gathered round it, a small and rather forlorn party beside the places laid for the threshers. Even so, we were still listening for the hum of the machine's approach, and did not eat much. Afterwards, Ransom and Robbie took up their milking pails. Mrs. Ransom put the food back in the larder.

The next morning was wild and bright, with fitful cloudings after a night of rain. I found the barn doors open again, and the granary door stopped wide open against the wind with stones. Ransom was stamping slowly round and round his little watch-tower of a silo, pausing and gazing with shaded eyes to where the road disappeared between two fells. Robbie was finishing cleaning out the shippin; then he came and stood. They both stood.

'They were still at Riley's yesterday,' he explained. 'They'll have packed up by breakfast: t'rain would have hindered them from finishing last night. But they'll have done by breakfast. Look, what's yon?'

We stared hard at a red object, preceded by a smaller just coming into the view. But it proved to be a car followed by a lorry.

About half-past eleven, Mrs. Ransom brought out the food and set it on the table—a leg of cold pork

and various pies, while vegetables simmered in pots over the fire. But still the thresher did not come, and dinner-time passed and tea-time came again, and they were still the same small party among the plethora of food.

Old Ransom was vexed and bewildered. I was used to the roundabout ways of threshing machines in Suffolk and the unreliable promises of their owners, trying to satisfy a dozen impatient farmers at once on a sudden rise in corn. But in Suffolk the household is put to no trouble of preparation; if the farmer provides a drink of beer, that is more than is looked for. Here, with all that threshing-time involved, punctuality was to be expected.

'They said they'd be here for sure yesterday afternoon,' the old man complained.

'Tis too bad,' his wife echoed. 'They must know food won't keep.'

The Rockfalls were quite as aware of the non-arrival of the thresher as the Ransoms. Mrs. Rockfall was indignant. 'What it cost poor old Mrs. Ransom to get up from bed that she never ought to have left, and go traipsing around, and then doing all that baking.' Rockfall himself, and neighbours, echoed these sentiments. Rockfall in his usual way, on a windy eyrie of his land, at sight of the Ransom's quiet, empty yard, his words half-carried away by the wind, 'Tisna' good enough—after putting a body to all that trouble——' In fact threshers were becoming a by-word in this little group of farmsteads.

Mrs. Ransom, after the second day, would not set the table again. By the third afternoon rain started once more. Mr. Ransom in a fury cried to Robbie through the gusts, 'Put t'saddle on Captain.'

Robbie stared; Mr. Ransom had not ridden the old black horse for years. For some reason they do not seem to ride much in that district, although the kind of farm horse that Captain was, was by no means too heavy to trot a journey. Mr. Ransom had told me how, when younger, he had followed the

hounds on Captain. 'You just had to sit tight—there was no stopping him.'

It was so long since he had ridden that neither was quite sure where the saddle was. But they found it : Captain was saddled, and away he went over the fields, by gaps in walls, and over walls that had no gaps, in the pouring rain and wind.

He was gone a long while. It began to grow dark, and Mrs. Ransom's anxiety at seeing him ride off increased with every hour. At last a clatter on the cobbles, more welcome than sound of the thresher now, told of his return. He appeared in the kitchen, streaming wet under the lamp, ejaculating vehemently with lips for which he had not yet sufficient breath.

'When I got to Riley's they told me thresher'd gone to Latten. So I rode toward Latten, and came up with them crossing Scamble Fell. They said they'd come to me after they'd been to Latten. "You're going to Latten and you can bide at Latten," I said, "I wouldn't have you now if you turned and came straight back. I'll thresh with stick as I always have done, and if I had 'un in my hand now I'd let you feel it, getting my woman out of bed to provide for you and then not coming".'

The old man, drenched and furious, paused for breath, then with raised fist began saying it all over again. How I could picture him on the wild fell, threatening the threshers in the wind and rain, their procession halted before his gaunt figure.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

I went up to the Beacon Fell for the last time with George. We were taking a dozen sheep that had been left behind when the flock was driven up there. Rockfall was off to market to sell a cow and possibly buy a pig for Christmas. It was sunny, even warm

down at the farm. We perspired, rounding up a last straggler that appeared behind us on a hill above the beck, just when we thought we were well away with our bunch. We sent Flash back after it, with the right exhortations. The ewe disappeared and so did the dog, and we waited and called in vain. We had to go back, and after climbing up and down, found Flash crunching some choice old bones under a wall, and the ewe farther off than ever. At last we rounded her up with the others, which had also scattered again, and after much calling persuaded Flash to follow, though not without his bones. These he continued to sit down and munch at intervals, and we really might have saved our breath and let him stay behind. But there were hopes that one day in this busy life he might be trained, or obedience come suddenly upon him. By the time we had passed the Beacon the cold was like something solid. George and I confessed we had neither of us actually been on the top of the Beacon, though we had often passed over its shoulder along the sheep-track, and we agreed on our return journey to climb right over it.

When we came to the fell we had the task of rounding up the sheep and counting the whole flock, to see if any had strayed. Not for the first time George and I acted the part of a pair of sheep-dogs, hunting sheep out of bogs, from behind rocks and all sorts of inaccessible places. We drove them eventually to the stone sheep-fold, by a sort of skill we had evolved of communicating at a distance and anticipating each other's manœuvres. It was a matter mostly of getting enough sheep together to set up a concerted movement in the required direction, which would attract and start others in the same way. But if the flow halted for more than a minute or two, while we beat back for smaller groups, the nucleus would begin to disintegrate swiftly, each sheep going its own way. At last we had them by the fold, the new arrivals meeting the others there. For

a matter of minutes all stood perfectly still in that place as though bewitched, standing on plinths of rock, singly or in groups, while George's finger jabbed the air, and so did mine. After three counts we agreed that there were five missing. They all stood looking at us. 'Crunch' came from behind a rock. The white faces turned as one. Then from another direction, above us, 'Crash'. We turned sharply—even Flash forgot his bone. There, on a platform of rock, two rams—ours and another—were drawing back to dash at one another for the second time. Crash, crash, crash—their heads and spiral horns beat together. Every collision echoed through the shadowy fell. The sunlight was leaving it at three o'clock. The flock looked on indifferently.

'They'd go on till one killed t'other,' said George as we approached the rams. We seized the stranger by his curly horns, one on each side of him, and between us dragged him up to the gate, noting the branded initials on one of his horns. We put him on his proper part of the fell, where he made off speedily in search of his own wives.

We returned homewards, after mending the gap in the wall through which the stranger had come. But neither of us re-opened the subject of returning by way of the top of the Beacon.

There was nothing we could do about the missing five but report the fact. 'Have you ever been lost on the fell?' I asked George, as a mist or cloud came about us.

'Father and I were up on fell once when it came a snowstorm,' he replied, 'and we were nigh losing ourselves then.'

At the farm, tea was on the table, and Rockfall had just returned from market. He came into the room and took parcels of groceries out of every pocket—cheese, margarine, sugar, tea, and lastly a big roll of bacon. 'Where's t'pig?' asked Mrs. Rockfall seeing this, 'is that all of him you've brought home?' She was insistent that they should have a

pig to kill for Christmas, and to pickle. The ration of shop bacon was not at all what she had been used to.

'Nay,' said Rockfall, 'they were all fat hogs in t'market.' (The government, of course, now bought all fat stock.)

'Weren't there any stores?' asked his wife.

'None big enough to kill.'

'We could fatten him.'

'Not by Christmas. Cows were making up to £80,' he added, to change the subject.

We all sat down to tea, and we reported on our expedition to the fell. We speculated as to where the five missing ewes might be and hoped they might turn up again one day. There was a chocolate sandwich cake on the table which Molly had filled while it was yet warm, so the cream had melted into the cake and turned it 'sad'. She was teased all through the meal on this account, as though, having been baking all these years, she did not yet know better than to put filling into a warm cake. Her young brother opened his slice to reveal the soggy mess inside, which added to her confusion; and she was glad when the cake was eaten, which did not take long, despite the complaints.

'Somehow I can't make cakes that don't go sad,' she said. 'Though I can bake bread all right.'

We had fish for tea that day, brought from town by Rockfall in one of his pockets, and fried by Mrs. Rockfall in oatmeal. The benefit of the oats was already being enjoyed, and Uncle Billy's mill was busy. They ate their own oatmeal porridge for breakfast now, and oatmeal gruel for the calves stood in pails before the fire.

'Farmers ought to be self-supporting these days,' Mrs. Rockfall said, to return to the question of the pig. But Rockfall departed upstairs to change his breeches for milking.

The following market-day they had a wild heifer

to get to the sale. The cattle truck was already booked by others, and there was nothing for it but that he and George should drive the heifer there on foot. I went into market that morning on the bus. Half-way there the bus pulled up with a jerk which nearly threw us out of our seats ; I was just in time to see a large object rush down a bank on our left in front of the vehicle. It was the heifer, followed through the gap it had made in the hedge and down the bank by young George. The last I saw of it from the bus, it seemed to be making for home.

But I was standing in the cattle-market later when the heifer came galloping in, apparently alone. George and Rockfall followed later ; and after a pursuit down alley-ways the beast was finally cornered and pent. George had mud even on his nose : he was scratched, tattered, and hardly had breath to tell me of their adventures.

After a bit he revived, and we went the round of the market. The large cattle-bays were like hot-houses with the body-heat of the cows and fat beasts. There were litters of weaned pigs in the pig pens and store pigs of all sizes. But there were few pigs in comparison with the cattle, for so large a market as this. It is not really a pig-breeding neighbourhood, and I gathered that most pigs were sold before winter, save one to be fattened for the farm-house. George picked up one young pig of a litter, and immediately it began to have a fit. He put it down hurriedly, and after some squirmings and violent shakings, it seemed partially to recover. Of the farmers standing by, one said it was caused by the cold concrete after a warm sty. Another averred that it was too much food, 'It's been pushed (*i.e.*, stuffed) ; you can see.' Yet a third was of the opinion that too many potatoes gave rise to these fits, which were caused by indigestion. We left them leaning over the pen, deep in discussion. We came to an auction ring where several people sat, and pigs were being driven round and bid for and bought singly. These were

what is known as 'store pigs', being lean, of the Large-White breed. I saw Rockfall sitting there.

That same afternoon a Large-White pig came shuffling and protesting down the steep track to Beck Mill with Rockfall behind it. He got it as far as the beck and then shut it in one of the cowsheds for the night. When I looked out just before going to bed, I heard crunchings coming from there. Next morning Rockfall, Mrs. Rockfall, Molly, and George came down to view the Christmas pig, and help drive it the rest of the way home. 'Why,' exclaimed Molly, opening the door, 'it's eaten t'coal. I didn't know pigs would eat coal,' she said to me.

'They certainly do,' I told her, 'and love chewing cinders.'

There had been a bag of coal in the shed, and the Large-White pig had rootled in this and was white no longer. Seeing us all looking at him, he did what pigs always do when they want to escape, rushed straight into the people he wished to escape from, right through us. He paused at the edge of the beck. Carefully, coaxingly we guided him towards the narrow plank bridge which he must cross to reach Brant Farm. His snout was just there, pointing along it. One concerted shove from behind and——. He reacted strongly in the way natural to pigs, by turning round and running in the opposite direction, knocking us to right and left. Several times we tried to get him back to the bridge, but he became more and more intransigent. Rockfall was getting impatient, Mrs. Rockfall trying to hide from him her sense of amusement, leaning on the great, grunting, skittering body of the pig, pretending to shove, but really helpless with laughter. I found her amusement infectious. 'Twill never go over.' When we looked at the girth of the pig and the narrowness of the bridge it was obvious, but we had to keep on trying, or looking as though we were trying, till Rockfall gave the order to stop.

'What do you think you're up to?' said Molly, as

Mrs. Rockfall, I, and the pig all lurched together. 'Art drunk?'

Then Eileen came along from feeding her hens and said, 'You'll never get pig over bridge,' as though it had not occurred to us.

The pig meanwhile had half-fallen into the beck. Next moment he was in altogether and obviously could not get back. Well, he would not go by the bridge, so he would have to wade. The beck was low, and very shallow there. It was the place where the carts crossed, and there was no more water than would come up to his hocks. But instead of walking across he turned downstream. Eileen was the only one who had on rubber boots, and she was sent in forthwith, to drive him across. But the pig, at her splashing entry, only went the more quickly in the direction he had chosen. The beck grew deeper, the water flapped against his belly, but he went on. He began to lose his legs. Eileen cried out that the water was coming in over the tops of her boots.

'That doesna' matter,' called her father, 'get to pig, girl.' But pig was now afloat and bounced against and under the bridge. It looked as though he would be back in the town he came from in a short while. We all chased along the bank after him, telling each other excitedly to find a long pole. We wrenched at lengths of wood, but they all seemed firmly rooted in the ground.

However, at a bend in the stream, the current carried him to the bank, and he had enough gumption left to find his feet before he rolled off it again. He clambered slowly up and out of the water. He had had enough of that. He seemed none the worse for his bathe, rather whiter. He shook his ears then trotted across the meadow looking quite comfortable, jaunty almost. Mrs. Rockfall picked her way over from rock to rock in her clogs—she was going to make sure of her Christmas pig—and followed him up the hill to the farm. The rest were content to go back and cross by the bridge.

'First I saw of pig mother was chasing him across yard with broom,' said Jimmy, disappointed at having missed the fun.

The pig was shut away in a back place and fattened. 'Don't tell anybody we're going to kill a pig,' I was warned. The great local practical joke of painting your neighbour's pig between the killing and the scalding (making a superhuman labour of the latter) was to be guarded against at all costs.

'When I was a girl,' Mrs. Rockfall told me, 'my grandmother gave me a penny to scream when the pig was being killed, so neighbour folks shouldn't hear that we were killing one.'

Her grandparents took elaborate precautions against having this practical joke played upon them, locking the door of the pig's shed each night and chaining the dog near. Yet, after all, on the morning of the killing, they awoke to find the pig smeared all over with red and green paint and a little note left nailed to a beam, on which was printed in capitals this travesty of scripture, 'Watch, for ye know not when the bridegroom cometh.'

It was Mrs. Rockfall, the girl herself, who had done it, she told me. She must have been hungry indeed for fun, seeing that it was she who had to bear most of the labour of getting the paint off, as she well knew beforehand.

My time at Fellside came to an end. I returned finally to Suffolk, to my own acres; to be followed, as it happened, by Nora and the children in the spring.

I was sorry to say good-bye to them all. Rockfall shook me by the hand in his shippin, his bull looking over his shoulder, and said I had been 'good company'.

As I climbed the steep track from Beck Mill for the last time, I looked across the beck valley and saw the pig hanging in the middenstead, dead but unpainted, pink as a blossom in the flush of early light. The very ensign, hung out, of Fellside family

life. And the new cart stood beside him, very painted indeed, brilliantly orange and green.

I crossed Mr. Ransom's yard, and saw that his barn doors were open. The old man was inside, bending over some unbound sheaves, with hens standing round. As I opened the gate to the road I heard his flail begin to thump.

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